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**THE LAKE OF  
THE ROYAL CROCODILES**

*“The best work I’ve  
read about Russia.”*

## LAUGHING ODYSSEY

BY

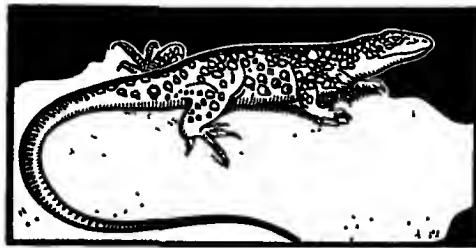
EILEEN BIGLAND

“This book reveals contemporary Russia to me more clearly than any I have read. Mrs. Bigland went to Russia with the intention of enjoying herself, which is the only spirit in which to travel. I wish we could settle down with Mrs. Bigland to watch the landscape and the people in it as we travel with her all the way to the Caspian and the Crimea and through the Caucasus; but I hope I have said enough to suggest just what an amount of life there is in this book, and how very much worth while it is to become acquainted with that life.”—COMPTON MACKENZIE

# THE LAKE OF THE ROYAL CROCODILES

*By*

EILEEN BIGLAND



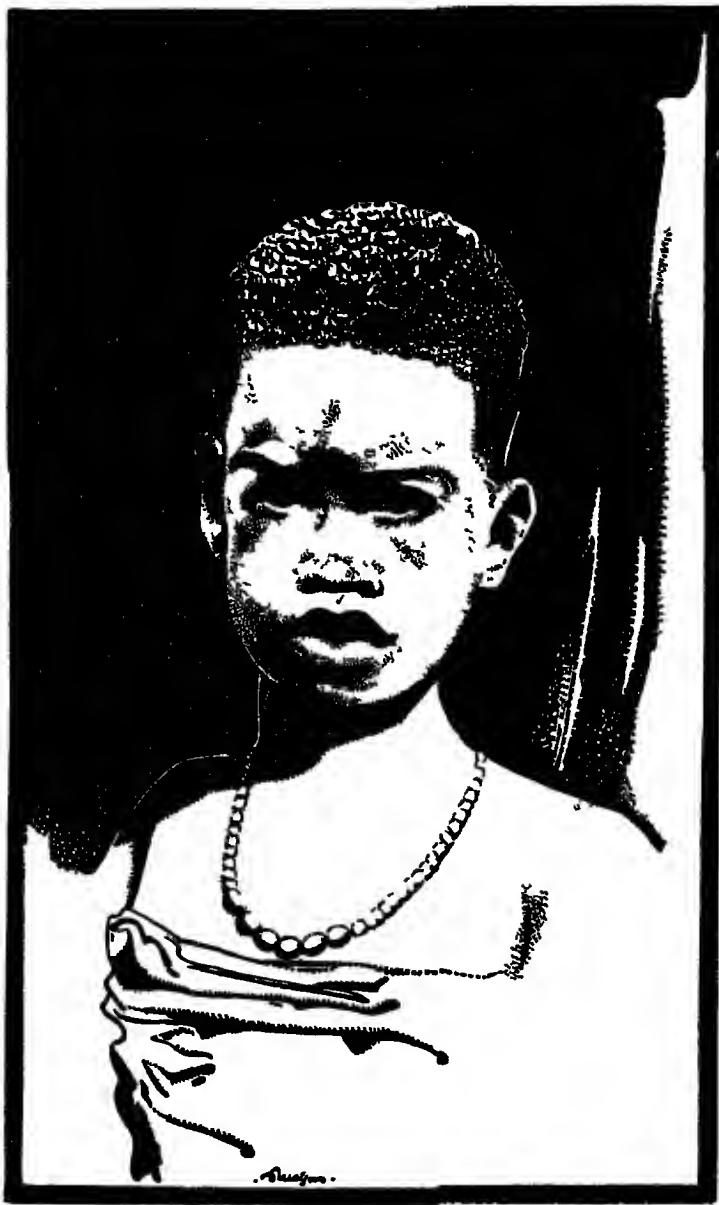
HODDER AND STOUGHTON

*First printed 1939*

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN  
FOR HODDER AND STOUGHTON LIMITED  
BY JARROLD AND SONS LTD. NORWICH

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A BEMBA GIRL



A BEMBA YOUTH



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By JOHN NICOLSON, A.R.E.

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## *AUTHOR'S FOREWORD*

THIS book is in no way intended to be a serious study of the Bemba tribe or of prevailing conditions in North-eastern Rhodesia. It is merely a record of surface impressions gained during a too-brief visit to Tropical Africa, although I am very well aware that if it had not been for the kindness of my hosts in showing me a great deal the average casual traveller does not see, the book could not have been written at all.

My thanks are also due to Imperial Airways, who carried me so admirably over some 13,000 miles, and to Messrs. Kodak Limited; but my deepest gratitude must be to Mulemfwe and James, those two men of the Bemba tribe who not only looked after my many expeditions but admitted me to friendship.

E. B.

*November 1938*



## PROLOGUE

### I

“O MIGHTY Chiti, son of the Crocodile, thy flame is fierce in the land. Thou art above all, and ever present, and encirclest thy people like the river Chosi. Awake, O Mighty Chitimukulu!”<sup>1</sup>

Over two hundred years ago a court singer sang those words while his King rested and the warriors of the tribe slept fitfully lest enemies should attack them and drive them back to the dense forests from which they had come. For the Bemba, Lords of the Crocodile totem, were sweeping through the Congo towards the great African lakes, Mweru, Bangweolu, Tanganyika and Nyasa, and the singer knew well that it was his duty to arouse them from slumber so that they might be ready to do battle with the hostile peoples who surrounded them and to overcome the animals which beset their path. Indeed, he knew his duty so well that when his soul grew tired of his ceaseless chant he raised groping hands to his empty eye-sockets and remembered the wrath of the Crocodile King and the savage twist of a chief's thumb.

A cruel thumb that; one which had deprived him of any hope of deserting Chitimukulu or of offering his services to another king. Mutilated men were looked at askance in that wild country, and however sweetly a minstrel sang he could not escape the rough justice meted out to his kind by those who gazed upon his eyeless face and knew thereby that once he had sinned.

Such a small sin it had been: a mere matter of happening to choose as bathing-pool the reach of river sacred to the use

<sup>1</sup> Chibemba is a phonetic language, and the accent is laid on the penultimate syllable.

of the King's wives. No explanation had availed—but in his heart the singer knew that his punishment had been deserved, so he drooped his eyelids over the ghastly sockets and sang on valiantly: "O Mighty Chiti, son of the Crocodile!"

His chant penetrated the slumber of the chiefs and the King himself stirred uneasily because, in the moment of awakening, nightmare pursued him. He remembered the crime he had committed against his father, the Luban King, Makasa Mulopwe, and the long and hazardous journey from the land of Kola he had undertaken with the arrogant young headmen who had cast in their lot with him, and his heart lay heavy in his breast, for although Makasa had only rebuked him and said he must march to a far country Chitimukulu knew that his outrage against tribal law had been unforgivable.

But by the time he had risen and eaten memory of his sin had faded, and he boasted vaingloriously to the chiefs of Matipa, Chyavula and Chungu of the richness and safety of the great plateau he hoped to reach ere long. There they would find relief from all their ills and rule omnipotently over inferior tribes. So dazzling was the picture he painted that his followers strode ahead through the bush, laughing and chattering, secure in the belief that Chitimukulu could conquer all Africa.

They found, alas, no degree of the safety they sought. No sooner did they subdue one tribe than another, stronger enemy rose to greet them, and the cunning Arab trader tried to bewitch them into accepting bright beads and stuffs in exchange for Bemba women, and the wild things of the bush gave added terror to their journey. The plateau of their dreams receded, became a mirage which danced tantalisingly on the horizon. Chitimukulu grew old and frail, but his indomitable spirit carried him on until death put an end to his adventurings. The younger men of the tribe, who could not remember their Congo home and who had been bred to the fierce, lawless life of the nomad,

marched on with renewed zeal under the leadership of another king, Chitimukulu the Second. For them there could be no turning back: they must fight their way to the fabled country of the great lakes.

For the next hundred and fifty years the Bemba advance continued. The Kings of the Crocodile totem were not easily thwarted; indeed, their tenacity of purpose was remarkable. Despite inter-tribal quarrels, innumerable hardships and heavy losses in battle, they swept on towards their goal and spread out, fanwise, across the land for which they had waged such long warfare. Pereira, the Portuguese explorer, came into contact with them at the close of the eighteenth century and brought back many stories of their exploits, and later on some of his compatriots also told of the Bemba warriors; but these regarded the strange white men with suspicion and made fully sure of non-interference by fixing strict boundaries round the regions they had inhabited. Rows of human heads impaled upon rough poles formed a grisly barrier between them and the outer world, and were sufficient to dissuade any inquisitive European from invasion of the Bemba country, so the Chitimukulus were left isolated, remote rulers wrapped in legend.

But in 1867 David Livingstone penetrated the Bemba stronghold. Perhaps because this white man was essentially a man of peace, or perhaps because he was already sick and in dire need of nourishment, Chitapwanka, the seventeenth King of the Crocodile, greeted him with much politeness and ceremony, making him a present of a cow.

“We passed through the inner stockade, and then on to an enormous hut, where sat Chitapwanka with three drummers, and ten or more men with rattles in their hands. The drummers beat furiously, and the rattlers kept in time to the drums, two of them advancing and receding in a stooping posture, with rattles near the ground, as if doing the Chief obeisance, but still keeping time with the

.others. I declined to sit on the ground, and an enormous tusk was brought for me. The Chief saluted courteously."<sup>1</sup>

Yet despite the fact that Chitapwanka graciously gave Livingstone the elephant tusk "because he had sat on it", visitors to the Bemba remained few and far between and some twenty years later, when the power of the Bemba was feared over the whole plateau from Nyasa to Mweru, Lieutenant Giraud, a Frenchman who waxed lyrical about the princely gifts received from the reigning Chitimukulu, was suspected of casting a fatal spell on his kingly host.

Very definitely the Crocodile Kings did not welcome guests. They stayed aloof, jealously guarding the territories they had come so far to seize, and even the news which filtered through to them of that greatest of all pioneers, Cecil John Rhodes, failed to interest them. Little by little, however, their majesty dwindled. There were no more tribes left to subdue, and the lordly Chitimukulu was forced to watch his warriors turning their swords, or rather their spears, into ploughshares, since food was scarce and the people had to live. Finally, the great plateau held so tenaciously by the Bemba passed into the possession of Great Britain and became part of Northern Rhodesia. Without bloodshed the white man of vision had conquered the savage chiefs from the Congo, and the glory of the Crocodile totem faded sadly.

The spirit of the tribe lived on. A Chitimukulu, no longer known as King but as Paramount Chief, still rules over the Bemba from his village near Kasama. He is an old man with many wives and an infinite capacity for strong liquor, but his authority over his people is unassailable. He has grown accustomed to the white man, and all thoughts of warfare have departed from him, but sometimes as he dreams in the sun he hears the voice of the blind court singer, "O Mighty Chiti, son of the Crocodile. . . . Awake, O Mighty Chitimukulu!"

<sup>1</sup> David Livingstone, *The Last Journals*, Vol. I.

## II

On Good Friday, 1914, a young soldier trekked northwards through the Bemba country. He was on hunting leave, and towards evening he shot a rhinoceros, an act which rejoiced his carriers' hearts, because they had not tasted meat for many days. "O *Bwana*," they said, "may we not camp here and rest until the *chipembe* (rhinoceros) is eaten?"

The soldier agreed and, leaving them to skin and cut up the kill, splashed on through swamps after more game. Suddenly he paused for before him, perfect as a jewel, lay a lake of incredible blueness. It was only a little lake, some five miles long by a mile or so wide, but as he gazed upon it he knew it was the loveliest thing in all Africa, that continent full of strange beauty. And even as he looked the colour of the water changed under the rays of the setting sun from sapphire to molten gold, and from gold to rosy red. On the far side of the lake, to the west, a sweet small valley opened greenly between the great dark hills which ranged themselves, sentinel-wise, in a circle around this magic place, and as the soldier stared at the valley he vowed that some day, somehow, he would come to live there.

The sun died behind the western hills and the moon rose brilliant in the east turning the water to a sheet of silver. Slowly the soldier retraced his steps through a swamp alive with the chant of frogs and the chk-chk of crickets. He was a severely practical person, a man of action—but he had glimpsed paradise.

Easter Saturday rose clear and hot. The sitatunga antelope, most graceful of animals, leapt before the soldier as he walked; but he did not shoot them. They were part and parcel of the place on which he had set his heart, of the lake which now shone under the sun in all its peerless beauty. The Bemba villagers greeted him courteously, yet with a certain dignity. "What is the name of your lake?"

he asked; and they told him, "Shiwa Ngandu, the Lake of the Crocodiles."

All Easter Day the soldier explored the lake and its surroundings, and each moment his wish to settle beside it grew. He did not minimise the difficulties the accomplishment of his wish would entail. All his belongings would have to come a three weeks' journey by native carrier and by boat; the soil was poor and barren, because the lake lay over 5,000 feet above sea level; the Lukalashi and Manshia rivers, two of the Congo sources which fed Shiwa before continuing their long way eastwards, were raging torrents during the rainy season. . But set against these things was the sheer wonder of the place and the desire to create there an estate which would be entirely self-supporting. . . . As the soldier turned back on his long trek south, plans shaped themselves in his mind.

He did not know then that four pitiless years lay between him and fulfilment of his dream.

A few months later he was in France, but all through the War thought of Shiwa Ngandu stayed with him, and when he slept his dream became nightmare for always he arrived, footsore and exhausted, at the eastern edge of that lovely lake only to find it utterly destroyed by earthquake, by volcano or by flood.

But in 1920 the soldier returned to Africa. The lake still gleamed in the sunlight and the valley still crept between the dark hills. Now they were his very own and he settled down to cultivate his lands, an uphill task which entailed many weary years of trial and error, of disappointment, of sudden ravages by locusts and other pests. The Bemba helped him manfully. Warriors themselves, they appreciated his military methods in dealing with them, and what appealed to them even more was the fact that this white man had a tremendous sense of justice. Under his leadership they learnt how to grow citrus, how to tend cattle and sheep, how to build houses, bridges and

roads. The vast estate of some 30,000 acres was run by a council of headmen, or *capitaos*, above whom was the soldier who arbitrated on all problems.

So the work went on and gradually the green valley became dotted with orange and lime plantations, and cattle kraals appeared by the lakeside, and fat-tailed sheep fed on the hillsides. And over a hundred miles away old Chitimukulu grunted approval when his chiefs told him of these things. The *Bwana Rhinoceros* was good.

## III .

In a London club I listened to the story of the Crocodile ~~Kisumu~~, and of their lake, Shiwa Ngandu. I wanted to see ~~a 1<sup>st</sup>~~ fighting tribe, discover more about their history, their tribal law, and their customs. Even more I wanted to see their home, that place of legendary beauty.

But Northern Rhodesia was half the world away.

"It's the wrong way to get there, because it gives no idea of the remoteness of Shiwa, but the quickest route is by Empire flying-boat to Kisumu and on by plane. Four and a half days altogether."

Four and a half days from England—and barely a score of years earlier the soldier had taken three weeks from a spot comparatively near his goal!

I went out and bought a map of Central Africa.

## CHAPTER I

### FLYING SOUTH

#### I

SITTING in a dimly lit hotel lounge at five o'clock in the morning dreams of Shiwa Ngandu deserted me. In the middle distance an energetic charlady scrubbed tiles; to my left the night porter drooped behind his desk; to my right a weary youth emptied ashtrays; opposite me sat three figures whom I took to be my fellow passengers. They blinked at me: I blinked back. One was an elderly woman with severe features and an enormous number of bags and boxes, the labels on which proclaimed she was a lady of title; the second was a female of puce complexion who breathed tearfully into her handbag; the third was an Outpost of Empire with a flowing moustache, a tussore suit and two solar topees swinging from a malacca cane, who almost forced me to believe in a contention I had long disregarded—that the battle of Waterloo had been won on the playing fields of Eton.

“Goin’ far?” barked this apparition.

I said squeakily, “Central Africa”; then blushed at the absurdity of my statement.

He puffed scornfully and launched into a long account of the wonders of Karachi to which I listened vaguely until the door of the lift clanged open and from it stepped a girl carrying a lion.

The Outpost of Empire gulped the remainder of his speech: the rest of us were shattered. Big game, yes, in its rightful place, but definitely not in the lounge of a Southampton hotel. Not for quite five minutes did any of us realise that the beast was a gigantic stuffed toy. (Afterwards its owner swore she heard the Lady of

Title whisper "Nice pussy, pretty pussy," in an effort to placate it.)

Escorted by a disgustingly jovial flight-clerk we packed into a car and were presently decanted on to a jetty. Nobody spoke: life was too grim. A strong wind, punctuated by gusts of rain, blew into our faces, and the pontoon leading to the *Cassiopeia* swayed horribly as we traileed down it. The captain took one look at the lion, said, "My God, livestock," and ushered us aboard.

When we were all settled and the steward had closed *Cassiopeia*'s doors I sat up and began to take notice. Planes were things familiar; flying-boats were not, and I was anxious to see how passengers reacted to this mode of travel. The Outpost of Empire was thumping his table with one of his solar topees and loudly demanding a double brandy; the puce-coloured female was rummaging through her bag and wailing that flight was impossible without white wings to aid one, a remark which entranced me until I found out she was merely referring to a remedy for air-sickness; the girl with the lion was evidently taking no risks and had retired to a bunk specially fitted up for her amidships; the Lady of Title was opening a sheaf of telegrams. For myself I stuffed cotton wool hopefully into my ears and tried to delude myself that Athens was but a step.

*Cassiopeia* surged forward and up; then suddenly, gloriously, she left Southampton Water far behind her and made for the coast of France. Journey to Africa had begun.

Under the influence of "white wings" puce-colour grew chatty. Didn't I think the crew were sweet?—this with an arch glance towards the first officer. And wasn't the captain a perfect darling? Just wait until I saw them in their tropical uniforms next morning! Madeline—that was her daughter—was so popular with these flying men and always said what charming fellows they were. But then, Madeline was such a gay girl, always flying to and fro from Cairo. Did I know dear old Cairo? The best city in the

world. . . . And the shops! I must visit so-and-so's and so-and-so's, and as for the cabarets, well, there were at least half a dozen that simply mustn't be missed. . . .

I employed the time before this barrage lifted in demolishing a large breakfast and coming to the conclusion that my companion was the Mrs. Simon Artz of modern Cairo.

Somewhere below us lay France, but we rode above the clouds as though above a Polar sea crammed with icebergs until two peaks of the Massif Central appeared in the south west, white and shimmering in the clear light. I removed the cotton wool from my ears and stayed happy until we came down in a shrieking mistral to Lake Marignane and I felt as though my head would burst. "And I *told* you to swallow hard," said the captain reproachfully as he handed me into the launch.

We were a sorry party as we sat moodily in the rest-house on the quay, staring at the distant Alps and waiting for *Cassiopeia* to refuel. We were all so deaf that our voices sounded tinny in our own ears, and the only conversation possible was a series of "echs?" Mrs. Simon Artz chewed "white wings" despondently, the Outpost of Empire fumed because the bar was shut, the Lady of Title read a Holiday Guide to Greece, and the Lioness (for what other name could one call her?) hugged her stuffed brother more closely to her heart.

But as soon as we took off from the lake and soared eastwards we grew cheerful once more, and I played delightedly with the theory that long flights made you so air-minded that you became in very truth a being who only awakened to full life when a few thousand feet above the earth. Unfortunately, just as I was elaborating this notion I caught sight of Marseilles, long a favourite city, and thus lost one of my few remaining illusions as from the air it looked like a huddle of old scrap-iron tossed down beside the sea. I recovered myself during study of an air-chart of Southern

Europe which seemed scored with red lines, squares and triangles.

"Those mark the corridors between forbidden zones," explained the captain a little later.

Now I could understand why France and Italy should deter foreign aircraft from flying over fortified areas; but why the Greeks should possess more restrictions than these two countries put together defeated me. To reach Athens, apparently, you had to perform innumerable curvettings from Corfu to Sunium.

"Just fancy," said the Lady of Title in a rapt voice, "to-night we shall see, . . .

"The Isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece  
Where burning Sappho loved and sung. . . ."

Judging by the chart it looked as though we might see more of them than we wished, but I forbore argument. Somehow I wasn't in the mood for Byron. Leaving the captain to cope with classic verse I wandered forward to talk to the Lioness, who proved, now that *Cassiopeia* was gliding above the smooth blue Mediterranean, a most entertaining companion. Together we giggled at the stupid jokes which always seem so incredibly entertaining on a long journey; together we fell silent as Corsica rose, a magic island, from the sea. Far below us lay St. Florent white and lovely beside an emerald green gulf, and to the south, behind forest-clad hills which looked a dim grey owing to their nearness to the brilliant water, towered shining, snow-covered peaks.

She was so beautiful, this Corsica ringed by a cobalt sea, but as we passed over Bastia I looked towards the hazy outline of Elba and wondered how often the exiled Napoleon had stood on its shore and stared, heavy-eyed, at the island where once he had dreamed youthful dreams of greatness, and felt glad that he had repaid the irony of his captors in choosing such a prison by his triumphant landing at Eze.

But we droned on above the rocks of Planasia, where an earlier and far less important Emperor, Agrippa Postumus, had lived in banishment, and I forgot the little Corsican and thought only of the Greeks and Romans who had once sailed and warred amongst these Mediterranean islands, and knew for the first time a feeling which was to attack me often during my journey, a feeling of awe (almost of guilt) at flying in the most modern form of transportation the ingenuity of the twentieth century could devise above places which bore such ancient history.

The coastline of Italy showed ahead, its long spits of land stretching out like so many tentacles into the sea, and Tuscany unrolled beneath us with its chessboard plains, its neat symmetry of vineyard and olive grove, its tidy, well-kept hills. I blinked down at the roads which are Mussolini's pride and thought that if any ardent admirer of Fascism wished to delight his soul he should fly over Italy. For there is nothing, to my mind, more symbolic of a modern Caesar's activities than these roads which cleave, straight and determined as sword-thrusts, through the Italian countryside. They are multitudinous and they are endless. They circle round cities, wriggle over mountains, curve about lakes, carry on arrogantly to their ultimate destinations. From the air they hit you in the eye, these broad white ribbons which bear a nation's destiny on their immaculate surfaces. Watching them your mind grows confused, visualises a thousand conquerors of Abyssinia, develops a streamline complex.

After the roads it was a relief to come to rest on Lake Bracciano. There are many more famous and more beautiful lakes in Italy, but I personally always have an especial fondness for this small sheet of water that beams so sweetly under the hot sun. Surrounded by olive-clad hills it is guarded by a toy castle built of pale golden stone, and it is marred by just one thing—officialdom.

The steward had barely unlocked the door when a resplendent lieutenant, followed by three soldiers with upturned,

plume-decorated hats, stepped briskly aboard from a launch. Apparently, although other authorities had to scrutinise us all over again on shore, the military had to satisfy themselves that (a) we were fit subjects for such scrutiny and that (b) we had no contraband stuffed under our chairs. We 'wilted: it was very hot and we were a shade hungry and we hadn't seen so many revolvers since the Great War. Even the Outpost of Empire, who had eschewed the Mediterranean and slept since Marseilles, awakened a strangely shaken man. Silently we trooped into a launch plastered with signs forbidding smoking, spitting, coughing and several other things which none of us were ever likely to do. Silently we landed and were escorted to a grim building by more revolvers and plumed hats. Silently we sat down on hard cane chairs.

The silence got on my nerves. I whispered fiercely to the Lioness, "Why on earth did you bring that stuffed animal ashore with you? He only makes things worse."

"But, darling, he's so *British*. And then his name, Gory Rasputin, surely that ought to do them good?"

I subsided. I always did when the lion's name was mentioned.

The Lady of Title was the first to be ushered into the passport room. She came back indignant. "They made me take my hat off. Ridiculous!"

"Dagoes!" exploded the Outpost of Empire.

We looked around a trifle apprehensively. With so many revolvers about the place such a remark seemed foolish. But the Fascisti, for some reason which will always remain incomprehensible to me, were now studiously polite. Would we like some tea? Would we care to purchase some refreshment at the bar? Would we step just a little way and see the magnificent new building, twenty-nine by fifteen metres, in process of erection by *Ala Vittoria*?

The tea was a pale, tired liquid with a dab of butter floating in it; the bar was ominously closed; the magnificent

*Ala Vittoria* effort a mass of bricks and mortar; the very air bristled with revolvers. We drooped into our chairs again and wondered if an Italian official of any kind had ever been known to smile and what would happen to him if he did. Oppression sank on us like a cloud and did not lift until *Cassiopeia* shook the waters of Bracciano from her floats and steered towards Rome. Not over Rome, of course, because Il Duce forbids any aircraft to fly above the city lest, I suppose, some enterprising anarchist drops a bomb on the Palazzo Venezia. But we were near enough to see the Capitol and Mons Palatinus rising from the plain, and to watch the squiggly yellow Tiber winding his tortuous way towards the sea, and to think how odd it was that a place founded by those legendary brothers, Romulus and Remus, should look so much more pleasing from the air than did any modern city.

After Rome the roads began again. I averted my gaze, ate a substantial lunch, and asked the steward what they did when they travelled Jews on flying-boats since pig, in some form or another, formed the staple dish at each meal. He answered solemnly that they made special arrangements, a remark which sent the Outpost of Empire into a state verging on apoplexy. Fortunately, Mrs. Simon Artz chose this moment to launch into a second eulogy of her daughter, Madeline, and he calmed down and went to sleep again.

We began to climb. Ten thousand feet, twelve thousand . . . we wrapped blankets about our knees, hustled into our coats, stuck our feet into foot-warmers. Just below us the peaks of the Sabine Range glinted coldly in the pale light, and below them again, spiralling so dizzily that one panted as one looked at them, were those inescapable roads. "They're so obviously emulating their maker," I said to the Lioness. "'If I advance, follow me; if I retreat, kill me; if I die, avenge me.'" But *Cassiopeia*, regretting her good behaviour since Marseilles, was now bouncing and bucketing

to such an extent that the only answer was a groan and a hasty flight to the bunk amidships.

At fifteen thousand feet the Lady of Title suddenly decided she *must* have her suitcase, the *smallest* one, the one with the blue canvas cover. The flight-clerk obligingly dived into the baggage hold only to find that the case required was right at the bottom of a pile of trunks. Having just attempted to lift my typewriter I regarded him with horror as he struggled and heaved and perspired. He took off his coat, he was hurled from side to side of the compartment as he tried to lift boxes, finally he staggered forth with the case.

The Lady of Title thanked him graciously, made much palaver with keys, opened the case and took from it a large packet of soap flakes and a heap of crumpled underclothing. Armed with these treasures she made a majestic, if somewhat uneven, progress in the direction of the lavatory.

"Well," said Mrs. Simon Artz, "washing your clothes while you cross the Apennines in a flying-boat is a new one on me."

The curtains shrouding the Lioness's bunk parted. "Did you see that?" she hissed.

I grinned at the flight-clerk. He turned away and mopped his forehead.

*Cassiopeia* gave a series of terrific bumps as though to denote her disapproval, and the steward spent the next hour being extremely efficient. Determined not to add to his, or my own, discomfort I stared out of the window and thought what a pity it was that white wings should grow weary. I admit, however, that this lofty attitude towards human frailty was sorely tried when we made an abrupt descent to five thousand feet and the indefatigable steward plumped a tray of large and pink iced-cakes on my table. The first officer came along and sat down beside me. "Enjoy your afternoon?"

I didn't answer. I dared not.

The Adriatic coast came into view, a succession of small, white-sanded bays, and as we glided on over Apulia I began to feel better. "Anyway," said the steward comfortingly as he removed the untouched cakes, "you're the only one who didn't need a casserole."

This reminder of recent agony was too much, a "casserole" being a *papier mâché* receptacle much in demand during rough passages. I went to sleep and awakened to pandemonium in Brindisi harbour. The Outpost of Empire was stumping up and down the smoking cabin cursing the heat, the delay and the flies, and fulminating against all women. The Lioness and Mrs. Simon Artz were leaning from the open doorway breathing in sea air mingled with a piercing aroma of drains. Outside the lavatory door were the captain, the flight-clerk, the steward, and three Italian officials. It appeared that the Lady of Title was still washing her garments and that nobody knew quite what to do about it. After a whispered conversation the might of Italy took command of the situation. Rapping the door thunderously with the butt end of his revolver the leading soldier let out a torrent of speech in which the only word I could make out was "Duchessa." Perhaps the appellation was appreciated, for immediately the door opened and the lady emerged, soap flakes and all. The captain was apologetic, the Italians furious and full of requests that she step into the launch forthwith. She looked at and through them and sailed into the main cabin. "I must put my washing to dry first," she said.

As an example of that British phlegm so often read about and so seldom encountered, the incident was superb.

## II

"That," said the captain, "is Albania. When you look at it you understand why its King is called Zog, and why his sisters are always having their photographs taken in a

variety of strange costumes, and why its politicians indulge in blood feuds."

I looked, and agreed with him. In order to preserve his sanity the Albanian assuredly needed to add a touch of musical comedy to life, for of all the grim countries in Europe this formidable mass of mountains was the grimmest. Sight of it, indeed, almost ruined my joy in the Ionian Sea. Behind a rampart of rocky cliffs destitute of any vegetation frowned the Acroceraunian Mountains, and behind them the white-capped Griva gazed austere down on the desolate scene. Occasionally, in astonishing fashion, a village clung limpet-wise to the cliff face, although how its inhabitants ever gained access to their homes I couldn't make out; but for the most part Albania looked so grey, so dead, that it was hard to believe human beings lived there at all. Suddenly I saw a pitiful attempt at civilisation; a small harbour at the mouth of which queer-shaped rocks lay humped like prehistoric monsters, a dingy little town that cowered under a shelf of granite. Thin plumes of smoke rose from the houses and the sunlight flashed on the sail of a tiny boat. Somebody then really did exist in this benighted land and presumably found sustenance from the few laboriously cultivated green patches beside the harbour, but anything more depressing than their life could scarcely be imagined.

"I wonder," said the captain. "After all, they've got the Ionian to look at."

I glanced down at the deep blue water above which we floated and thought that Albanian view only made Albania worse. "You might as well torture a prisoner by giving him a cell with a huge barred window overlooking lovely gardens."

But Albania did not bear scrutiny any longer, and soon we dipped down to fly low over San Salvatore and the sweet, low hills of Corfu where the Phoenicians once lived and ruled. The Lady of Title, however, had no eye for the

magic of Corfu harbour. She whisked her garments (now dry) from the backs of the chairs they had decorated since Brindisi, folded them neatly, packed them into her case, and called to the flight-clerk, "Please be sure that *all* my luggage comes ashore at Athens. I am stopping there, you know."

I regret to say I knew distinct relief at her words. Washing your clothes while crossing the Apennines was bad enough; washing them while crossing the Nubian desert would have been too much.

We flew on over Greece. Her mountains were so much friendlier than those of Albania, and even the snowy giants of the Pindus range glowed a welcome in the rich, rare light of the late afternoon sun. As always, the sheer beauty of this land gave me an ache at the heart. The crystal-clear air, the purple hills, the iridescent gleam of bay or gulf: these could not be found anywhere else in the world, and *Cassiopeia* became an enchanted ship sailing above an enchanted country.

We passed over the marvellous near-circle of the Gulf of Arta and again I knew that odd feeling of awe, for here, nearly two thousand years ago, the slender frigates of Octavian had swept up to Actium and amazingly defeated Mark Antony's mighty fleet. And here was Actium itself, its crumbling grey walls still defying the centuries, and beyond it the mountains rose again, wine-dark against a pale sky, until we reached the Gulf of Corinth where the water was so clear that we could see the ray-fish darting beneath its surface. Far to our left Parnassus stood, his feet wrapped in thick green forest, his head still streaked with snow, while on the right of the Gulf Xylokastrom sheltered among its cypresses below the glory of Zyria.

"We'll land before sunset," said the captain, and I knew that I should not rest happy unless I watched that sunset from the Parthenon. Almost I frowned at the rounded tops of Helicon and at Corinth town, lovely though they

were. Why couldn't *Cassiopeia* sweep on over the Isthmus and let me reach the city in time?

The voice of the Outpost of Empire spoke loudly in my ear. "There's the Canal, only decent bit of work these Greeks have ever done. Had to get our engineers to help them, though, so I've heard."

I opened my mouth to tell him that even before the Christian era men had envisaged that canal and laboured for it as best they could; then I shut it again. What was the use of explaining such things to one who was clearly antipathetic to anything which had happened before 1880?

The Saronic Gulf opened exquisitely before us, Attica on the one side, the Peloponnese on the other, the dream islands of Aegina and Salamis lying so peacefully in a sea already tinged with rose, and ahead of us was Athens dreaming on her hillsides, the brown, triangular shape of Lycabettus cutting the sky. We circled above the Piraeus, hovered for an instant, skimmed down and churned the still waters of the harbour into a flurry of spray.

The captain appeared. He wore a broad grin. "We've beaten the record from Southampton to Athens by eight minutes!"

"Splendid!" I gasped, and flung myself into the arms of Jackson, who was waiting in the launch alongside us. "I want a taxi, quick. The Acropolis!"

Jackson beamed upon me. "Customs first, madam, passports, money."

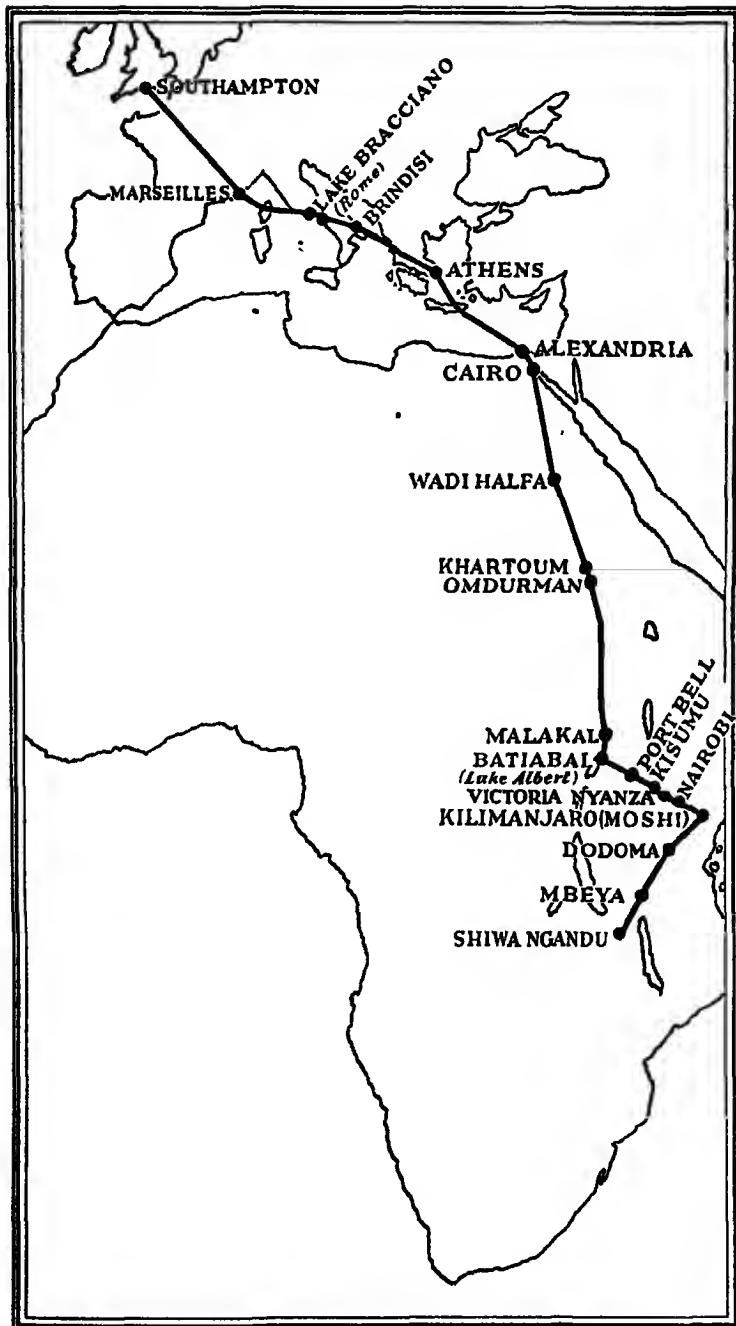
Damn! I had forgotten these irritating formalities, forgotten also that the Greeks can hold a candle to the Russians for slowness. Jackson soothed me as I fumed at the unconscionable delay in the Customs House, and I thought, not for the first time, what an amazing character he was. Long before Imperial Airways, hampered by the Grecian obstinacy in disallowing any but men of their own race to act as ground staff for the Empire flying-boats, engaged Jackson as general factotum, this little square man with the rosy

face and the bright, bird-like eyes skipped around Athens. Heaven knew his original nationality, but he had acquired an astonishing accent, a devastating knowledge of Athenian history, and an armour which effectively protected him from the curses, the questions and the parsimony of tourists. No sooner did a traveller arrive in the city than Jackson popped, like a *djinn*, out of the ground at his elbow and suggested all manner of excursions. He knew all the historic monuments and buildings, he would organise expeditions to Marathon, to Phaleron, to Sunium, he had a friend in Delphi and another in Mycenae, he could take one to the best restaurants, cabarets, shops at which to buy Hymettan honey, or tobacco, or rich silks. No traveller ever escaped from Jackson. He clung tenaciously until excursions had been made and, more important still, until remuneration had been paid.

More than once before I had basely fled from Jackson, but now it was borne in upon me that he was my nearest and dearest friend. By dint of a polyglot mixture of swear words he induced Greek officialdom to hurry—*actually hurry*—and performed some sort of sleight of hand with my passport. Finally he pushed me into a taxi, told the driver exactly what would happen to his descendants if he did not get me to the Acropolis in five minutes, and banged the door.

Despite his efforts and the fact that the driver risked my neck and his own, the sun had set by the time we panted up the hill and here, at Beulé Gate, there was yet another delay because I had no *drachmae* and the driver, surprisingly, refused to accept English money. Sadly I changed a pound note, well aware that hundreds of *drachmae* and *lepta* would weight my bag, and suddenly a figure appeared before me. “I Georg,” it said simply. “Jackson told me you come.”

Bush wireless wasn’t in it with Jackson. How he had signalled Georg of my arrival was a mystery, and anyway, I didn’t want Georg. He was a huge, shambling man in





dirty trousers and a once-white shirt several sizes too large for him, and he spoilt the Acropolis. Getting rid of him cost me seventy-five *drachmae* and an attack of ill-temper, deepened by a certain knowledge that a percentage of this sum would find its way into Jackson's pockets. But once I was alone, climbing the high, worn steps to the Parthenon, peace descended on me. I sat down at the base of a Doric pillar and looked out at a Greece unbelievably beautiful in the changing evening light, and took a letter received that morning in England from my handbag. "And think, you will see the Parthenon again (I pray there is sun and blue sky—and a moon), and if you see the sun set over Aegina remember your old friend and think of him watching it nightly two years ago, never tiring of the changing colours. Hymettus will have lost its purple by now, for the thyme will be over, but the bees will be humming as in Homer's day . . . and the wine-dark sea will still lap around Sunium. . . ." I dropped the letter in my lap and stared across towards Sunium.

Presently I picked the letter up again and read on, ". . . And all Athens will gather in the bar at the *Grande Bretagne* to drink cocktails, just as they frequented the *dyopá* two thousand, five hundred years since. Drink some *oozo* and then some nice white wine (not *rezinato*), and if there are hors d'oeuvres for dinner eat ink fish."

Something stirred in me: hunger. Turning my back on loveliness I walked slowly down to the city.

As usual, Athens was very gay, very noisy, very crowded. The soldiers in their funny white kilts still marched about in front of the Palace, and in Constitution Square multitudes of people sipped their drinks at little tables, and bands played, and Asiatic men in white robes sold brilliant rugs, and vendors of cigarettes cried their wares. The bar of the *Grande Bretagne* was full of flashing, dark-eyed young men in immaculate white suits and enchanting girls dressed *à la* Duchess of Kent, with here and there a rare, fair-haired

Greek. I sat down beside the captain, toasted the success of *Cassiopeia* in *oozo*, and felt comforted. Out of the press loomed Jackson. "You got there in time?"

I glared at him. "Jackson, how could you produce that awful Georg?"

The old reprobate winked. "A nice man, Georg. He will show you all the monuments after dinner."

"He certainly won't."

A shrivelled paw appeared under my nose. "Very sad," the voice was wistful. "I got Madame's luggage so quickly through the Customs, I procured the taxi, I found Georg . . ."

I parted with another fifty *drachmae*. There was no resisting Jackson. He sidled off in search of further prey and I said, "What exactly *is* Jackson?"

The captain smiled. "The Greeks had a word for it."

### III

The Lioness and I devoured sweet wild strawberries, overlaid them with crisp rolls spread with Hymettan honey, and agreed there was something good about early rising. "Although why you wear a fur coat and carry five hot-water bottles about with you in this heat," I said, "I can't imagine."

"I'm the coldest person that ever was. I say, did you know we'd lost the Outpost? He's gone on to Alex in *Camilla*, Karachi-bound."

My spirits leapt. "God bless Karachi. Then there'll only be you and me after we drop Mrs. Simon Artz." Carrying Gory Rasputin, the hot-water bottles, a stuffed penguin and several books between us we heaved ourselves into the car to find it already had a female occupant who greeted me warmly. "I'm so glad we're travelling together! I've had your books from the library."

I sat back heavily on the penguin. For just twenty-four

hours I had been away from books and the mere thought of talking about them upset me.

The lady rattled on. Apart from being a great reader of books she was a very famous person indeed. She had been the first woman to fly over somewhere with an unpronounceable name, and now she was going to be the first woman to fly round the world by commercial aircraft. All her clothes for the trip were made of uncrushable lace, and what she didn't know about Metaxas wasn't worth knowing, and wouldn't it be a grand idea if she and I had our photographs taken together in the desert—such good publicity.

I think it was the photograph 'bit that finished me. I was suddenly conscious that it was four a.m., that I had had but little sleep, that I was about to fly to Darkest Africa, and that I was no longer young. Three of the Lioness's hot-water bottles slipped from my nerveless hands and plopped to the floor of the car. The lady regarded me severely, "You must become a Christian Scientist," she said.

At that moment Mrs. Simon Artz panted up to join us, and I listened avidly to a recital of how Madeline charmed the Imperial Airways captains so much that they always put off the time of the boat's departure to a reasonable hour. The Lioness proved a broken reed; she took the giggles.

Athens in the dawn was yet lovelier than Athens in the sunset, but I couldn't appreciate it. My one aim was to clamber into *Cassiopeia*, barricade myself into the smoking cabin, and go to sleep. Only that way could I escape the doctrines of Mrs. Baker Eddy. It meant missing sight of the *Ægean* islands but that couldn't be helped.

I awakened to find the Lioness tickling my nose with Gory Rasputin's tail. "She's coming to sit up here in a minute, opposite you."

But I was in repentant mood. The poor woman was entitled to sit where she pleased and my behaviour at Athens had been quite disgusting. "She's very nice-looking and terribly intelligent."

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The Lioness agreed. "Let's call her Cutie," she said. We did. The highly unsuitable name stuck.

We had passed the islands of the Cyclades and were nearing Crete, that grim and mountainous land where Zeus was supposedly born and suckled by Capella, the nymph-goat, and where Theseus braved the anger of King Minos and slew the minotaur, the dreaded monster who devoured seven maidens and seven youths of Athens each year. Gazing at Mount Ida and the frowning Dicte range it was easy to believe those ancient stories; but of "many-fountained Ida" I was not so sure, for there was nothing motherly about her stark limestone peak.

"There's Mirabella Bay," the steward pointed. "Sometimes we come down there to re-fuel."

I stared at the formidable, cliff-surrounded harbour and felt grateful we were not doing so that morning because any effort to land *Cassiopeia* on that sullen sheet of water would assuredly lead to disaster. I was still green: I did not know what seeming miracles flying-boats could perform.

"Never mind Mirabella," groaned Mrs. Simon Artz. "How long till Alex?"

"Three and a half to four hours," chirped the steward.

I began to type a letter. Cutie stared at me, fascinated, for a few minutes. "What happens if the boat bumps?"

"You take the typewriter on your lap," answered the Lioness gravely.

Cutie decided to risk it. Thereafter we thumped steadily on our respective machines until the captain appeared and told us we should land in an hour's time. As he retreated Cutie opened fire. Why had he left the cockpit? It would be a nice thing if we all plunged to our deaths in the Mediterranean through his carelessness. And when she had flown, a week or two previously from England to Athens she had noticed, to her horror, that there were no emergency landing-grounds provided and that the bulk of the

journey was overland. But this matter of the captain was the worst. The bare idea of him leaving the controls!

The Lioness and I entered into involved explanations of a flying-boat's ability to make a forced landing anywhere and at any time without injury to its passengers. We also explained that the first officer was perfectly capable of attending to the controls. Then, alas, I added thoughtlessly, "But neither of the pilots really needs to fly her; George does it for them."

"Who is George?" asked Cutie in a trembling voice.  
"The wireless operator?"

"He's not a man at all, he's the automatic pilot, a piece of machinery."

"Then how can it be called George?"

"Well, you see, he was called the robot pilot, and then some wag christened him Robey, and now he's George."

She stared hard at me. "I don't understand you." She turned back to her typewriter and whacked the keys for dear life, while I wished I could look over her shoulder and read her version of how robot became George.

Three minutes later the Lioness gave a yelp. She had sighted Africa.

#### IV

I sat in the customs-shed and blinked at Alexandria harbour and wondered how on earth we had ever landed in that whirligig of sea-traffic. There were grey battle-cruisers in a mighty line; there were the long, dark shapes of destroyers; there were great steamers belonging to many nations; there were three other flying-boats besides *Cassiopeia*; there were merchant ships of all kinds from tankers to coal-barges, and dashing in and out of the press with a fine disregard for safety were innumerable *feluccas*. Everything glittered: the water, the flags, the paintwork, the white decks, the sails, and the tall pale houses in the distance.

Everyone shouted: the crews, the stevedores, and the little boys who demanded *milliemes*.

In the shed the tarbush was omnipresent: so was the smell of Egyptian. Somebody once said that there were two million Egyptians and that one million, nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand of those were officials. He was right. Hordes of them milled around us as we sat on wicker-work chairs and all of them used the same approach, "Nice morning? Pleased to meet you. Please to sign this form."

We signed, but when a fat man danced up to me and asked if I had been fumigated, yes, no? I grew wary. Not for nothing had I read *Oriental Spotlight*. "Five shillings," I offered rapidly. He shook his head, beamed, demanded to know if I had ever suffered from yellow fever, syphilis or typhoid, and danced away.

Another came up. "Declaration forms, please? Ah, you have the typewriter and the camera." He tore up the form I had just filled in and presented me with a blank one. "Just write, 'nothing to declare', across it and sign your name."

"But I've got to tell the truth." I pointed to the list of penalties on the back of the form.

He smiled deliciously. "Not in Egypt, Madame."

*Ballet Egyptien!*

Unfortunately, Cutie held affinity with George Washington: she simply could not tell a lie. While we grilled in our wicker chairs a cohort of Egyptians pleaded with her to refrain from truth. "There will be such delay," they wailed. She was weakening when the fumigation gentleman waltzed forward once more. It appeared from her forms that the lady was going to visit East Africa before she returned to Alexandria to board a flying-boat for the Far East. She would realise, therefore, that she must spend eleven days' yellow fever quarantine in either Alexandria or Cairo on her return trip, as this disease, which was suspected in the Sudan, had not yet penetrated Asia.

Cutie was furious. Not for all the two million Egyptians would she spend eleven days in their hot, stifling, uncomfortable country. No, she would spend the eleven days in East Africa.

Vainly they argued with her. Was she not aware that as she required to journey north again through the suspected area her eleven days *must* be spent in Egypt? They hauled forth maps, they beckoned yet more tarbushes to the conflict, they flapped the air with fly-whisks, they did gavottes around the shed. Finally the captain intervened, soothed everybody somehow and led us, rather the worse for wear, up to the balcony of the British Sailing Club where we joined Mrs. Simon Artz for a farewell drink of ginger-beer. We were sorry to lose her: she was glad to go, for she hated flying-boats worse than I hate snakes. She was even enduring a long and dusty train journey from Alexandria to Cairo rather than go through a further hour's flight.

We looked at the Palace, and thought how vast it was and how lost little Farouk and his Farida must feel in it, and we found it was only nine o'clock, and I attributed a slightly giddy feeling to the flight from Athens until I discovered that the waiter had put gin in the ginger-beer, and Cutie moaned on about the quarantine, and the flight-clerk appeared and asked each of us for two and a penny so that he might have our Sudan *visas* stamped.

"Time," said the captain suddenly. On the way down to the jetty he added diffidently that the *Corinthian* was to take us on to Kisumu. We felt disgruntled. *Cassiopeia* was our dear friend. But there she was, poor thing, already pulled up on shore with a swarm of engineering staff removing her insides. Rather sulkily we climbed into our new home. "Breakfast," said the steward. We cheered up.

We flew low over the Nile to Cairo. To our left stretched the dim green of the Delta, scored with irrigation canals and dotted with queer humps which looked as if some strangely energetic Egyptian had been amusing himself

making mud pies, but which were in reality the dumps where they ground their grain. Far to the right was a faint line marking the end of fertility and the beginning of the desert, and as we grew nearer to it this sharp division between vegetation and sand fascinated me. How many men had the desert laughed at as it watched them toiling under the hot sun, striving with barrage and dam to extend those green patches which gave life to their fellows? How many times had the desert outwitted them, driven them back, called the unruly Nile to its assistance when those tiny black specks of humanity came too near to success? Yet generation after generation had laboured against the desert, making the Suez, the El Wiledaya barrage, the Assuan dam, the Ibrahimia canal, suffering the sicknesses that come upon men in hot climates, battling always against the shifting, silting sand. Looking down on that sharp division between gold and green I realised vaguely the immensity, the power and the cruelty of this continent of Africa.

Cairo crept beneath us, a huge huddle of mud roofs from which coarse tufts of grass sprouted hopefully. We swooped down on the river, gave several terrifying twists and glided to rest between banks covered with palms and glowing scarlet poinsettias. Cutie squinted disapprovingly through the windows. "It seems a very low quarter of the city."

The Lioness and myself, who had been admiring the poinsettias, followed her gaze in amazement. On the near shore, next to a very smartly painted boat which announced herself to be the *Queen of the Nile* steamer, squatted an odd collection of figures. There were aged men in pyjama trousers, and little boys in bright loin cloths, and young men in gay shirts, and girls in cheap European dress, and they were all tremendously interested in us. When the launch whisked us to the *Queen of the Nile* they stormed forward in a body and as we clambered up to the deck where

a supplement to breakfast in the shape of tea and biscuits was awaiting us, they clamoured wildly.

Out came Cutie's camera. "They're so picturesque!" "Don't go down among them," warned the captain. "You'll meet the *gulla-gulla* men."

She paused, one foot on the stairway. "What are *gulla-gulla* men?"

She knew soon enough. As she stepped off the *Queen of the Nile* they surrounded her until all we could see of her was the top of her head.

"Do you think," I asked the Lioness dreamily, "that we called Cutie Cutie because of her hats?"

The Lioness sighed enviously. We were both in love with Cutie's hats and wished we'd had the brains to think of the idea ourselves, because they were little lace turbans to which large straw brims could be attached when you went ashore. At present, however, the brim Cutie was wearing was being battered to pulp by the frantic *gulla-gullas*, and in a moment or two its owner emerged from the battle, brimless and scarlet-faced, a live chicken poking an inquiring head out of her coat collar, a small green snake coiled elegantly about her right wrist. We extricated her with difficulty, gave back the livestock, and hauled her aboard the *Queen of the Nile*. Long after we had left Cairo behind us Cutie lamented her brim—and the *gulla-gulla* men.

Meanwhile I indulged in some bribery and corruption. I wanted photographs of the Pyramids and of the citadel and thought it would be a splendid idea if the captain took them from the cockpit. "Wait till we see the Bor elephant, three hundred of them, in the Sudan."

I promptly bet him ten shillings we wouldn't count them. He took the camera and mounted to the upper deck. I got my photographs, but next day when we passed over the *sudd* swamps at ten thousand feet the famed Bor elephant looked like mice and to count them was an impossibility.

Cutie and I got out our typewriters. She wrote about the new Cairo houses planned by Sir Edwin Lutyens; I wrote about sand, said all there was to say in one short paragraph, and talked to the flight-clerk about Luxor. There was, I knew, a tame crocodile there, and remembering the wistful remark of my American publisher that he would relish a snapshot of myself "being rescued from the jaws of a crocodile because it would make such a grand book-jacket," I toyed with the idea of roping in this obliging, toothless reptile. Sorrowfully, the flight-clerk shook his head. We were not coming down at Luxor this trip.

"Would you mind," said Cutie's stern voice, "stopping chattering because I'm composing."

We regarded each other guiltily. The flight-clerk scuttled off and I settled down to watch the desert, a depressing occupation enlivened every now and again by the steward's brisk, "There's Assiut." "There's El Wili-daya." "There's Luxor." "There's Assuan." I peered vaguely at recent excavations, at brown towns clinging desperately to the Nile banks, at a blur which was the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, but principally I peered at sand—"such quantities of sand." On the surface of the desert, riding arrogantly on a camel, I might have seen the wonders of the ages. From the air I saw only desolation. I ate some more ham and went to sleep.

But not for long. Cutie was showing signs of that search for knowledge which was to devastate the Lioness and myself long before we reached Victoria Nyanza. She wanted to know where Tutankhamen's tomb was, and the Temple of the Hippopotamus God, and how many sluices El Wili-daya possessed, and why we had built that huge dam at Assuan, and if I would mind asking the captain and the first their views on the next war, and when we should reach Wadi Halfa.

We didn't need to be told when we reached Wadi Halfa. The knowledge smote us as we swept down and over

the Rock Temple of Abu Simbel, that strange mountain fashioned and carved by Rameses II into a symbol of his victory over the Syrians. In the upper air we had been pleasantly cool, but now hissing heat came at us in waves, submerged us, left us gasping. Oh, yes, we were nearing Wadi Halfa!

The cushions in the launch were so hot that we jumped when we sat on them; the steps up the bank so steep that we felt like taking them on all fours; the path leading to the rest-house so white under the blazing sun that our eyes were dazzled. Despite a large electric fan the room into which we were ushered was an inferno, and to my horror the first thing I saw was a stove. "Why do you have such a thing here?" I gasped to the resident.

"Oh, it's quite cold in the winter."

Cold in Wadi Halfa? Never!

Two enormous, solemn-faced Nubians in long white robes brought us tea, their bare feet padding softly on the tiled floor. We sipped it and stared at photographs of Gordon and Kitchener, and learnt that the former had built the rest-house and the latter made his headquarters there. There was something about Wolseley too, but the heat made my brain spin so that I could not listen any longer. Presently we crawled into a car and drove to the hotel, the only thing about Wadi Halfa I remember with pleasure, for of all tropical hotels it is assuredly the best. Quite small, it is built in the shape of a cross, and each bedroom has every imaginable aid to coolness.

Even so I couldn't win relief from the burning heat which seemed to shrivel my very bones. "Does anybody really live in Wadi Halfa?" I demanded of the manager.

He eyed me a shade scornfully. "Very fine town, Madame, very equable climate. And in the season—ah, you should see the ship-loads of people who come here for their vacation!"

I just couldn't believe him. Nobody in their seven

senses would spend a holiday in this desert town, and my mind held a horrid vision of boat-loads of half-witted Egyptians being decanted on to its banks by a relentless Government. Seeing more thirst for knowledge glinting from Cutie's eye I congratulated the manager hastily on having books for sale and bought Winston Churchill's *The River War*. It was only three in the afternoon. I would have a tepid bath and then lie on my bed and read.

I had the bath, and left it feeling hotter, if possible, than before. I tried to wash out a vest and desisted after two half-hearted rubs. I turned the electric fan on full blast above the bed and the sweat poured off me as I lifted the book in one hand.

But soon the magic of Churchill's prose caught me. I forgot the heat, and the flies, and the sand that stretched into infinity all around me and read on entranced. . . .

A Nubian padded in. It was after five. Would I like some tea?

No, but lime-juice would be pleasant, so he brought me a frosted glass full of the clear amber liquid and I sipped it slowly, my mind busy with Charles Gordon and that terrible war to avenge his death which dragged on so wearily for nine long years. I complained of Wadi Halfa's climate. What must Wolseley and Kitchener and their armies have endured as they marched and skirmished and battled in this fierce land? Feeling utterly ashamed I crammed a hat on my head and walked out.

Beside the mud huts women squatted to feed their babies, miserable small scraps whose sore eyes were literally clamped shut with flies. A sad race, these Sudanese, with all the sorrows of the world looking out at you from their dark faces. The only building of any magnificence seemed to be the Light and Power Station, a glittering white effort which overshadowed the little town. I walked towards the desert (at least, whichever way you walked in Wadi Halfa you came to the desert), and soon the greenish scrub gave

place to stunted thorn bushes, and as I rounded a corner in the path I almost stumbled over a kneeling camel who gazed at me reproachfully. He was a nice animal. He had dignity, and his jaws moved ceaselessly. I sat down beside him in the sand under a thorn bush and talked to him.

"Camel, do you remember when the soldiers came and Wolseley made his base here? And did you ever see Kitchener, that iron man?"

I could have sworn the camel nodded his head. For a few minutes we sat silent, in amity; then I got up, patted his neck and walked on towards Beher. To my surprise he uncurled his long legs and followed me, stepping so delicately that he scarcely disturbed the sand. He looked rather magnificent against the brilliant blue sky and he seemed anxious that I should appreciate the beauty of the ancient Beher temples which had brooded by the still green Nile for three thousand, five hundred years. When I rested beside them he stood near me, rubbing his side against their smooth walls, and when I started to walk back towards the town he paced arrogantly beside me until we reached the thorn bushes. Here he knelt down again and moved his head from side to side as much as to say, "Well, I have shown you my country."

He was so sensible, so human, that I felt the only polite thing to do was to shake hands with him, but he kept his front legs firmly tucked under him so I patted him once more, thanked him for his company, and set off for the hotel.

I was very weary long before I reached it. Wadi Halfa at sunset seemed hotter than Wadi Halfa at mid-afternoon, and the sand silted into my shoes, and my clothes stuck to my body. The night came down swiftly, and millions of frogs began their evening song from the Nile banks. As I trailed into the lounge I met the captain. "Tell me," I asked, "how long do camels live?"

"About thirty years as a rule."

I felt curiously shaken. Then my friend of the desert had only been making fun of me when he nodded at mention of Kitchener's name!

In my room I found an immensely agitated Cutie. She had made friends with a charming person who had something very grand to do with the Sudanese Railways, and he was a positive mine of information on the country, and he had asked her to go on a supper-picnic with him in a *felucca* up the Nile, and did I think it would be *safe*?

I flopped into a chair, too dazed with heat even to remove my sand-weighted shoes. "Oh, quite safe," I murmured. I couldn't imagine danger in Wadi Halfa.

## v

The Nile was a pale unearthly green in the dawn light and the palm trees rustled in a blistering wind as we took off the next morning and flew south above the Nubian desert to Khartoum. Suddenly the sun rose, a huge ball of fire in the grey eastern sky, and beneath it the sand glowed blood-red. It was miraculous, that desert dawn, so miraculous that description of it is impossible although in the mind one keeps memory of every detail of its splendour.

We climbed to twelve thousand feet and I glanced apprehensively at Cutie. Very evidently something had gone wrong with the teachings of Mrs. Baker Eddy because the face under the lace turban was drawn and wan. "What are the symptoms of yellow fever?" she asked in a sepulchral voice.

This was dreadful. The Lioness and I chattered brightly about a touch of the sun, but Cutie refused to be comforted. If it wasn't yellow fever, then it was blackwater, and if it wasn't that it was cholera. She felt so ill that she was sure death would seize her before we reached Khartoum. The steward rushed along with Bovril and was waved away. The captain produced a thermometer and was snubbed

for his pains. Finally, the flight-clerk brought a glass full of reddish liquid. "What is that?" demanded Cutie.

"Port and brandy."

She sipped it doubtfully, but she went on sipping. As though by magic the fever spectres vanished into nothingness. "I must type a letter," she announced vigorously. "My friend of last night told me so many interesting things about the country."

The portly and bulbous-eyed Egyptian who had arranged the Nile picnic had surpassed himself. I listened in awe and wonder to a remarkable account of the Sudan in which the salient points were (1) that the British would evacuate the country within three years, and (2) that any Britisher who stole the affections of a Sudanese lady was forced by His Majesty the King to marry her forthwith according to the rites of the English Church.

"And there you are," concluded Cutie triumphantly and began to hammer the typewriter.

I crawled forward and had a little talk with the captain. Then I went back to Cutie. "The cost of a really superior Sudanese wife is eighteen pounds and there are—er—no obligations attached."

She stared at me. "D'you mean to say," her voice was broken, "that he told me lies?"

"I'm afraid so."

"It's cruel!" she said passionately; then she calmed down. "Anyway, I've written the letter—and it makes a grand story."

I knew so well how she felt, for I myself had the journalistic instinct. We didn't look at each other; we hung our heads in shame. But it *was* a grand story.

Then *Corinthian* began her tricks. Apparently, she was rather temperamental about air-pockets and when she encountered these she flounced, and she bridled, and she side-stepped. "Kippers for breakfast," said the steward cheerfully.

I could have murdered him. He paid not the least attention to my glares and went on laying my table.

"I don't want any breakfast."

"Oh, yes, you do. A nice English kipper'll buck you up no end."

Most strangely, the man was right. I ate two mangoes, a large roll and the kipper, and felt rejuvenated.

But all the time between Wadi Halfa and Khartoum I was conscious of a shadow between myself and the sun which streamed so brightly through the windows. It was the shadow of Charles Gordon, the mystic who had come to evacuate that dark city where Blue and White Nile meet, and who had remained to fight the Mahdi until life itself was demanded of him as sacrifice for his ideals. It was the fashion of the moment in England to decry Gordon, to debunk him, but here, flying over the desolate land to which he had clung so tenaciously, one knew a clearer understanding of his queer character. And behind knowledge of Gordon, standing immobile as one of the mighty rocks which rose from the endless Nubian sands, was the figure of Kitchener, who had grimly and deliberately planned modern Khartoum in the shape of a Union Jack so that all rebels might look upon it and remember the might of Britain.

"I'm coming over jingoistic," I told the captain.

He stared at me sombrely. "It's a good thing to be."

I looked back at him and thought that he was a worthy descendant of those men who had reconquered the Sudan. He was very young, but his eyes had the wise expression which comes to the eyes of those who are accustomed to looking out over vast spaces. To-day he was in the Nubian desert, next week he might be in Karachi, the week after that in Singapore. And wherever he was he was responsible for the smooth running of a flying-boat, for His Majesty's mails, for the safety of his passengers. In all essentials his



SUDAN VIEW



job was more exacting than that of any record-breaking flier, yet he remained simple, quiet, serene.

"There's Omdurman," he said, and pointed to a brown mass which presently resolved itself into a gigantic collection of mud houses. "It is the biggest native town in Africa."

For a few moments we hung almost motionless above the town, and on the far bank of the river was Khartoum, black against the sand, while beyond it the two great rivers met. The White Nile was reddish brown, the Blue Nile dirty grey. Then we dipped to the water and the burning desert heat rushed to welcome us once more.

"Why ever anybody wanted to reconquer the Sudan I can't think," groaned Cutie, but for myself I felt that *The River War* had had a deeper objective than the mere reconquest of this vast barren land. It had been, in effect, a struggle to recapture that elusive yet magnetic thing, the soul of Africa.

"Come along and see the tree Gordon used to contemplate and gain strength from," said the captain; but as he, the Lioness and I trudged ankle-deep through the sand he added sadly that Khartoum had as many Gordon trees as England had King Charles's oaks. Anyway, the tree we were on our way to see was most popularly supposed to be the correct one. We nodded, too hot and breathless to answer, and pounded on.

"Here we are."

Another precious illusion went. I stared miserably at a stunted, twisted thorn, a malignant, wretched little tree—and I had always pictured Gordon gazing thirstily at a gracious, spreading monarch of a tropical forest. I put out a finger and touched a gnarled black branch, which rewarded my attentions by digging a thorn deep into my flesh. "Do you think," said the Lioness desperately, "that Gordon flung himself at the beastly thing so that its pricks might goad him to frenzy?"

We shook our heads glumly. Whatever Gordon had gained from his tree and however he had managed to derive anything at all from contemplation of it we could not fathom.

We returned to the landing-stage to find a Cutie highly indignant because an alert Sudanese official had insisted upon spraying her with the disinfectant spray used at every stop on *Corinthian's* cabins. She was also worried about her passport. Why should the flight-clerk withhold this document from her? How was she to know whether he had pocketed the two and a penny she had given him back in Alexandria or whether he had actually expended this sum with the Anglo-Egyptian Government?

We said kindly that the heat was getting her down, and that the flight-clerk was the soul of honour, and that at Malakal she would receive her passport duly stamped and sealed. But at mention of Malakal she gave a little scream. "Yellow fever!" All the way to Kosti she discussed this fell disease while I stared down at the thousands of thorn trees which now studded the desert and felt that all the germs of the tropics were fighting inside my body.

The excitement of watching the crocodiles basking on the banks of the White Nile relieved the tension. They lay like huge logs of wood on the pale sand and sometimes one would flop into the muddy reddish water with a splash. It was, I thought, very much their country, this huge stretch of sand and scrub with the great river flowing sulkily through it. The steward peered over my shoulder. "Nasty brutes"; then he sighed contentedly. "But I always like to see them again, make me feel I'm going home."

"But you're a Londoner?"

"Mm, but my girl lives in Kisumu." The Lioness and I were all ears. We loved romance and we thought it most fascinating to be in love with someone who lived in Kisumu. The steward waxed lyrical. His girl's father kept the local garage and for four glorious days he would laze with his

beloved beside Victoria Nyanza. Ah, Kisumu was a magnificent place and no mistake. Listening, we visualised a city of magic beauty; then he fished a photograph from his pocket. "See, here's the main street." We looked at it dully. Two rows of mud huts flanked an uneven roadway above which a row of rather drunken telegraph poles reared crazily. We sniffed. We didn't like the look of Kisumu one little bit. "A grand place," the steward went on. "It's got a cinema, and they dance in the hotel on Saturday nights, and the shops are fine."

I asked faintly if it also boasted a chiropodist, as Wadi Halfa had irritated my pet corn beyond all endurance.

"Oh, yes," said the steward gently. "He's a hairdresser as well, works in the hotel."

My spirits rose. I felt kindlier towards Kisumu and imagined a happy evening with this gentleman. It was the Lioness who dashed my hopes. "Don't you know it's Sunday?"

I gloomed out at the crocodiles. So much had happened since we had left Southampton on the Friday morning that I had lost all count of time.

"Cheer up," said the flight-clerk. "There'll be curry for lunch after Malakal."

The Nile at Malakal looked distressingly narrow and full of sandy islands and enormous masses of *sudd*, the decayed papyrus grass which floats so frighteningly from the swamps in blocks as big as good-sized houses. "Some day," said the first officer, "we'll lose the old crate to one of those."

It was a terrifying thought, and yet more frightening were the antics *Corinthian* was performing. She whizzed sideways, and up, and down, did agonising spirals above a remarkably hard piece of ground, slithered madly over the little town, righted herself in astonishing manner and taxied smoothly along the only strip of water which seemed free from *sudd*. The steward produced a roll of string with a scarlet tassel and a hook at one end. Opening the door he invited me to try my hand at fishing.

The river was alive with small darting creatures rather like grey mullet, and the natives of Malakal paddled solemnly to and fro in canoes catching them. We baited the hook with a piece of roll and told each other we should have fresh fish for lunch instead of curry, an optimistic statement speedily refuted since the line caught in a nice large lump of *sudd* and only the Lioness's sharp tug at my skirt saved me from an untimely end with the Nile crocodiles. After that we invited the first officer to try his luck; but at that moment a large launch drew up alongside us. "You can't go ashore here," warned the captain, "as they had a suspected case of yellow fever four months ago."

As the entire population of Malakal were boarding us from the launch this precaution seemed a trifle overdone, but we sat back meekly and submitted to being sprayed with pungent-smelling liquid by a large and determined Sudanese. "Nice spring morning," he beamed, and aimed the spray full at my right eye.

I asked mildly what Malakal was like in the summer, for if Wadi Halfa had been the hottest place on earth this was Hades. Through the open doors came a heat which was quite incredible, a sticky, clammy heat that reminded you of a thousand and one Turkish baths. "Nice wind," said the Sudanese.

I dripped.

"And now," remarked the captain as the population of Malakal departed in a chorus of good wishes, "for the Bor elephant."

More tantalising than any mirage in the desert were those elusive elephant. The Lioness and I glued our noses to the windows and grew fearfully excited over a group of dark blotches. "Trees," said the flight-clerk. We waved him away and clutched each other as we saw some other objects on the Nile banks. "Those aren't trees," said the Lioness triumphantly, "they're moving."

The steward paused in his laying of the lunch tables.

"Crocs again. Elephant don't live in rivers," he added gently.

The first officer strolled along. "Head winds. We're going up to ten thousand. Never mind, you'll save your ten bob."

"I didn't care about the ten bob. I wanted to count the Bor elephant.

"Eat your curry while it's hot," remarked the steward severely.

"If you thwart me again," snapped the Lioness, "I'll carry out the instruction that if you want to open the windows in case of emergency press sharply on the glass with foot or hand—and I'll use both feet."

Cutie gave a shriek. "You'll do nothing of the sort! Such a mad idea! You might kill us all!"

The atmosphere was fiercer than the taste of the curry. We swallowed crossly and glared at the *sudd* swamps until our eyeballs ached. Somewhere far below us in that vast stretch of green which glittered balefully as the sun beat down on its stagnant waters were the Bor elephant, over three hundred of them, threshing up and down the swamps as they had done for many years. And we couldn't see them. It was maddening. "Never mind the head-winds," we pleaded. "We don't mind if it's rough flying low."

Cutie gave tongue once more. "I mind. If you persist in this stupid talk I shall. . . I shall cable to London."

The first officer grew reminiscent. "Once a flying-boat did come down in the *sudd*. They stayed there two days, and dashed uncomfortable it was, too, with giraffe and buffalo and whatnot nosing around. At last a relief boat managed to land near them. Its captain was a bit of a wag, launched a rubber canoe and paddled over to them. He said, 'Dr. Livingstone, I presume?' which was really rather neat, only the captain of the rescued boat didn't think it a bit funny."

"Nor do I," announced Cutie.

The first faded out. Presently the captain appeared.  
"There you are, to your left."

The Lioness and I made a concerted dive for the window. And there, sure enough, was a herd of what looked like black mice crawling over a flat green surface. Feverishly we tried to count them, cannoning into each other as we did so. "One, two. . . ." "Five, eight, ten. . . . That isn't an elephant, you ass; it's an ant-hill."

The captain said virtuously, "You can buy me a drink at Kisumu."

The mice vanished. We sat back limply and said that after our bitter disappointment we thought he might fly us low over the Murchison Falls in Uganda, where big game abounded.

"Sorry. The weather makes that out of the question, but I'll try to show you the bend in the Victoria Nile between the Sudan and Uganda where they think the animals cross the river and take the yellow fever germ with them."

Cutie sniffed. "I for one shall be very glad to reach Kisumu."

Mention of that town dejected us yet further, for there we should have to say good-bye to *Corinthian* and her crew, and to-morrow the Lioness and myself would have to part at Nairobi, where she would journey to her home up-country and I should fly on over Kenya and Tanganyika to Shiwa Ngandu, and much as I longed to see that place I felt despondent. For three days now we had travelled through the sky together, had laughed, and talked, and formed friendships, had watched strangely different countries and people. In a few hours the voyage would be over.

Not even the sight of several giraffe in the bush south of Juba could quite rouse us from our melancholy.

"Have some beer?" suggested the steward.

We shook our heads. Our sorrows would not drown in beer.

The swamps had gone, and in their stead was mountainous, tree-covered country. We dropped low over the Uganda

border and the drone of our engines sent a herd of buck leaping through the bush, while a rhinoceros lifted his huge head, listened for a moment, and charged off down a hill-side at tremendous speed.

"Anybody would think," said Cutie as she overheard our delighted comments, "that you'd never been to a Zoo."

Perhaps it was childish of us to be comforted by sight of game, but these wild creatures held a fascination for me I was not to lose throughout my stay in Africa. Zoos, forsooth! I remembered sad-eyed and mangy-coated beasts seen behind bars and shivered. How they must miss the tropic sun, and the vast jungle, and the moon-bright nights when the bush was alive with movement.

"How big," said Cutie suddenly, "is Victoria Nyanza?"

The steward obligingly produced a small book which informed her that it was "the second largest fresh-water lake in the world, covering 26,828 square miles—almost the size of Ireland." I tried to look suitably impressed but couldn't really summon up any enthusiasm for a lake so enormous I simply couldn't visualise it. Cutie, however, was greatly interested and kept reading us bits out of the small book. "The lake is over 3,000 feet above sea-level. Isn't that wonderful? And we cross the equator a quarter of an hour north of Kisumu."

That didn't seem so good to me. If it had been "a nice spring morning" in Malakal, what was a nice spring night going to be like in Kisumu? But I couldn't argue. I was too busy looking for more game.

Presently we flew over Lake Kioga, where the *sudd* was massed in great patches. To our left rocky mountains towered against an inky sky, but we bore to the west away from the storm which threatened them, stared round-eyed at the beginnings of Victoria Nyanza, and swept down on to her waters in a confused muddle of heat, spray, dazzle of sunlight, and the inhabitants of Port Bell.

Watching the arrival of the flying-boat enlivened the

Sabbath calm of Port Bell. Every human being it contained, old or young, European, African or Indian, stood by the jetty and regarded us so earnestly that we crawled ashore feeling acutely embarrassed. The natives were immensely dressy, the men in gaudy shirts, the women in bright-coloured calico slips; but the few white people stood aloof looking a little shabby, a little tired, only their eyes alive with curiosity. Studying their faces I felt regret at the rigid British convention which forbade quick friendliness between us. They were so obviously aching for news of home: we could so easily have given it to them. In front of me Cutie hesitated; then she asked, "Are there any *gulla-gulla* men in Uganda?"

I reassured her a shade too hastily, for a bevy of black infants suddenly encircled our knees. "Penny, *Mama*?" "Two pennies, *Mama*?"

Cutie turned to the captain with dignity. "Would you please tell them that I am a spinster?"

The Lioness and I crept ahead, surreptitiously bestowing coppers. Wandering round the customs sheds we came to a tiny inlet covered with mauve water-lilies. "Ah!" said the Lioness, and took a step forward on to a tussock of grass which collapsed beneath her weight. An official rescued her with difficulty. "Two days ago a child did that and a croc dragged him under at once."

We turned our backs on the water-lilies after that.

Cutie was sitting on a bench looking out over the lake and trying to ignore the junior population of Port Bell. "Why don't we go back on board?" she demanded fretfully.

"I don't know." And for some obscure reason I added, "The captain hates the sea."

"This isn't the sea, it's Victoria Nyanza. What on earth do you mean?"

I apologised feebly. I meant nothing. I didn't know why I had quoted the words. My silly excuses buzzed like the flies which surrounded us.

The Lioness said sleepily, "Why don't you write an article explaining how all authors are really natural half-wits in private life?" Then she turned to me. "Honestly, darling, you are *classically* stupid at times, aren't you?"

If it hadn't been for the crocodiles I should have tipped her into the lake.

Somehow the bits of us that hadn't liquefied in the heat dumped themselves aboard the launch. Cutie eyed me suspiciously. I think she thought I might go berserk (nor do I blame her), so she read me a lot more from the small book. "Kisumu, formerly Port Florence, is situated on the Kavirondo Gulf. It is the principal port on the lake and the centre of the Kavirondo tribe from which much labour is recruited. They are a peace-loving, hard-working people. The lake scenery here is delightful."

"Mind your head, Madam," said the steward as he armed me into *Corinthian*. "Sticky hot, isn't it? Never mind, I'll make you a nice cup of tea when we've taken off."

"And I'll let you know when we're about to cross the line," promised the captain. I thought I caught a nasty gleam in his eye as he turned towards the ladder leading to the cockpit; but all my energies were concentrated in striving to retrieve the bones of my reputation by showing the greatest interest in Cutie's quotations.

Gradually we cooled down a trifle. We used Gory Rasputin's tail as a fan while we listened to some more about the fauna and flora of Kisumu, and much as we disliked thought of arrival there the steward's beaming face as he dashed to and fro with tea things made us feel ashamed of our selfishness. "He really does love her," said Cutie sentimentally as she sipped her tea.

I raised my steaming cup. "Yes, doesn't he? . . . My God, what's that?" For one terrible moment I nodded to Death. Scalding tea was running down my front, my inside seemed suspended above my head, my legs and feet simply weren't attached to me at all. Through a haze I

saw the captain's grinning face. "That," he announced courteously, "was the line."

What we said to him cannot be printed. By the time we had finished saying it *Corinthian* was swooping down through heavy clouds into an eerie, half-lit world. The waters of the lake were a sullen grey against the dark green of dense tropical bush. Somewhere in the middle distance were oil-tanks, a collection of gaunt sheds and hangars and another flying-boat, the *Caledonia*, while beyond these straggled ugly rows of little white and brown houses. We came down and even the spray we raised was dun-coloured. The steward opened the doors and the hot damp air struck our faces as a blow from a feverish man might strike. The Lioness and I stared at each other through the gloom. "The lake scenery here is delightful," we said simultaneously.

## VI

They will tell you in Kisumu that the sun has been known to shine there. Indeed, they are a little touchy on this subject and always finish up any discussion on it by reminding you of the close proximity of the line. For myself I couldn't see that being almost on the equator made up for a twilit existence under thundery, leaden skies, but then, as the inhabitants gravely pointed out, I wasn't staying long enough to appreciate the amenities of Kisumu.

I took a glance at the main street, where Indians with fabulous names offered to sell you anything from wireless sets to Japanese bicycles and agreed that maybe I was mistaken in my views, but I was staggered by a clock which dominated the town. Put up as a gracious and philanthropic gesture by an Asiatic gentleman who had reaped a fortune through selling life's little luxuries to the simple Kavirondo, it perched itself atop four frail, white-painted pillars set in the centre of a roundabout and guarded by no less than four lots of traffic lights. It was really a magnificent

clock—the only trouble was it did not go, but this slight failing worried neither the Asiatic nor the Kavirondo. “Clock!” they said proudly, and when you repeated the word they smiled at you and admitted you to friendship.

Only when you reached the hotel did you begin to understand the charm of Kisumu. Of necessity its windows, its doors and its verandahs were shrouded in mosquito netting, but its bedrooms all boasted modern bathrooms, its lounge was full of travellers from the ends of the earth, and its owner, an energetic Scot, was builder, ballast carrier and farmer as well as hotel-keeper.

In the small panelled bar airmen from Singapore swapped yarns with airmen from South Africa, Englishmen from Kenya talked to Belgians from the Congo, Germans from Tanganyika smoked cigars and swallowed lager. I found myself next an elderly Frenchman with a beard who was gathering material for a book. “*Inch by Inch through Darkest Kavirondo* I shall call it,” he shouted, and began a torrent of scientific explanation which left me breathless until the captain rescued me.

“The steward has brought his girl-friend along to see you.”

The Lioness and I were thrilled. After they had gone we sat on high stools and discussed romance, with the result that we were locked into the bar.

Now to be locked out of a bar at certain hours is no rarity; but to be locked into one is an experience, especially on a Sunday evening in Kisumu, where practically all the guests are so immured at nine p.m. For nobody pays the least attention to the locked door, but raps on the panels and calls “Boy!” when he wishes a drink, and an agile Kavirondo skips in and out with orders while his perspiring and Goanese superior clicks the key back and forth with startling swiftness.

The whole business worried me. “But why lock the bar at all?”

“Oh, it’s the custom,” said the first officer vaguely.

We came to the conclusion that the proximity of the line was to blame again.

Saying good-bye to the captain, the first, Mr. Wireless and the flight-clerk was a grisly business. We got it over quickly and trailed miserably along to bed. Propped on my dressing-table was the usual card provided for each passenger by a thoughtful air service. It informed me that at five o'clock on the morrow I should proceed to Nairobi, Moshi, Dodoma and Mbeya and it urged me to have my luggage ready by four a.m. Written in an obviously native hand in the corner was the further message, "Confidential breakfasts will be served in the lounge at four-thirty."

To be confidential over breakfast at any hour is difficult to me; at four-thirty it is a sheer impossibility. And in Kisumu there wasn't even a newspaper to drape before your scowling face.

"Good morning," said Cutie's voice.

"Good morning. I'm sorry, but I never talk at breakfast."

My appalling rudeness makes me shiver to this day—the Lioness rightly scolded me all the way to Nairobi—but at the time I felt too resentful against the world to care. Sourly I ate *paw-paw*, bundled into the car and bundled out at the airport. Behind me, resting on the shadowy water like great grey birds, were *Corinthian* and *Caledonia*. In front of me, sitting perkily on the ground like a sparrow, was the five-seater plane in which I was to travel. It was too much. I said to the Lioness, "I can't go in that; I'll die."

She sighed. "You'll wish you could when we bump over the Rift Valley."

Somewhere Cutie's voice was raised in ecstasy. "How lovely to see a *land* machine again. I never feel comfortable in these flying-boats."

That settled it. I wriggled into the wretched thing and sat down gingerly in a very small chair.

The pilot arrived. He was very large, so large that the aeroplane quivered under his weight and he had to haul himself piecemeal into the cockpit. I regarded him doubtfully; he was such a hearty person, his treatment of life so careless. "You all set?" he asked.

We squeaked "yes"; but just then a khaki-clad youth raced frantically across the aerodrome, an object like a cartwheel tucked under his arm. "You forgot your brim, Madam," he panted, as he thrust his burden towards Cutie.

That redoubtable woman bowed graciously and placed it, halo-wise, round her head. The propellers began to whir. We jolted madly across the rough grass and rose just in time to clear the road by inches. Willy-nilly, we were off.

Dawn came up to meet us from the east, flushing the tea plantations to rosy pink. As we circled above the lands by the lake we looked down on fields of cotton, rice and ground-nuts grouped around villages with thatched, mushroom-shaped roofs, but suddenly the Lioness, who had been reviling me for my bad behaviour, pointed ahead to an ominous range of mountains. "The Rift Valley," she said.

Later on I was to drive over part of the mysterious valley hidden by those mountains and to conceive a vast longing to journey through Africa from the Red Sea to the Luangwa in Northern Rhodesia by that curious deep cleft which cut through thousands of miles of hilly, rocky country; but at the moment all I cared for was my own comfort. There were such tales of the flight over the Rift. It was a district renowned for storms which made flying conditions notoriously bad, and in this tiny craft it seemed more than likely that my breakfast would not remain confidential.

It was a pity that I chose this moment to fish in my bag for a hankie because there, snugly tucked under an inner flap, were all the Life Insurance certificates I should have signed and handed to Imperial Airways before leaving

Southampton. "I daren't crash," I told the Lioness desperately. "Think of my starving family!"

Cutie got her own back. "You should have thought of them sooner."

We all began to laugh. We laughed so much that the pilot poked his head out of the cockpit and demanded to know the joke. When we recovered we were passing over the mountains easily and without a bump or a roll. It was queer country, great humps of bush-covered hill rising from irregular brown defiles which looked as though some giant fist had scooped them ruthlessly out of the red soil. "I'll show you the flamingo lakes," yelled the pilot, and sent his machine swirling and looping downwards. Through the window, at a distressingly acute angle, I caught sight of all loveliness and forgot my fears. Forest-clad hills, intensely green, surrounded a small lake which glowed deep rose-red in the sunlight since its waters were literally covered with thousands of flamingoes. On the banks, standing aloofly in little flocks, were pelicans, the black and white of their plumage sharply defined in the clear morning light.

"Can't we go round and round and round the lake?" we pleaded.

"There are plenty more," said the pilot cheerfully.

And there were, rosy jewels of dream-like beauty in their emerald settings, the pelican groups strung like black pearls in circles about them. Close to the last lake, in abrupt contrast, eight hippo splashed and wallowed in a pool below a river dam, their sides shining sleek and wet, their great broad heads poking ludicrously from the water as they heard the roar of our engines above them. Up we went and up, across more mountains, and dipped low again over Lake Naivasha, pale and exquisite, a lake so remote and delicate that one felt it had been transported from the moon; and then we hovered over the Longonot crater, that strange and ancient volcano inside the deep black walls of

which a luxuriant tropical forest flourishes arrogantly, defying all the theories of the ecologists.

Before us hung the Mau Escarpment, heavy with cloud, and even as we watched we saw the lightning leap so vividly along its ridges that the grey rock flickered scarlet, and purple, and gold. But we rode high above the storm into a sparkling blue sky, and thought how foolish our thoughts of death and sickness had been, and then we dropped slowly to the plateau and saw Nairobi stretched out on the flat, dusty land.

“When you stop in Kenya on your way home,” promised the Lioness, “I’ll take you through the Rift Valley.”

She kept her promise.

## VII

Nairobi devastated me. First of all there was a dreadful commotion because its leading citizens had not arranged a civic welcome for Cutie. Secondly, the airport was more sophisticated than anything I had seen in Africa. Thirdly, I had to part from the Lioness. Fourthly, there was dust, the kind that gives you a tickle in your throat, and sore eyes, and choked lungs, and a gritty feeling all down your spine.

The pilot (his nickname was Fatty, and he didn’t mind it) said, “You’ve got over an hour.”

I blinked at him out of red eyes. I didn’t want five minutes in this town.

But the Lioness had by now greeted her husband and brother-in-law. “Come on, we’ll dash into town.”

We dashed. Through a smother of dust I noticed a lot of grand buildings, and most of the Aga Khan’s subjects, and a bewildering number of huge hotels. We stopped at one of these and sat on chromium-plated chairs in its vast lounge sipping whisky-sodas in peace until I happened to glance at the clock. It was only 8.30 a.m. I had beaten my Alexandria record!

"I thought nobody in the tropics drank until after sundown?"

The others looked at me a trifle strangely. "Have some coffee?" they asked kindly.

I had some. It was very hot and there was quite a bit of sand in it, and long before I had finished it an airways man dragged me off lest I should miss the plane. Tearfully I embraced the Lioness, Gory Rasputin and the penguin, and fled.

The only other passenger was a depressed small man who pushed wads of cotton wool into his ears and then insisted upon carrying on a conversation.

"D'you play polo?"

"No."

"Ech?"

"NO."

"Pity. Grand game. Where you going?"

"North-eastern Rhodesia."

"Ech?"

"NORTH-EASTERN RHODESIA."

"Good God!" He looked thoroughly scandalised, but recovered himself by pointing out the railway which snaked its way through the frowning hills to Mombasa. I regarded it without interest. What were railways to me or I to railways?

Fatty looked round. "Game Reserve."

Boredom departed. We were only a few hundred feet up, and below us a herd of zebra were galloping for dear life through the scrubby bush. Suddenly I saw a lion, a fine fellow with tossing head and twitching tail, and almost fell out of the machine with excitement. The ground seemed literally to swarm with game: rhinoceros, buffalo, eland, hartebeeste, wildebeeste, buck of all kinds. The wart-hogs, those large, bushy-necked animals which bear such small resemblance to the European idea of a pig, especially intrigued me for they seemed to know no fear

of the aeroplane and only stopped their grazing to stare calmly up at us.

Apart from the fact that game may not be shot or harmed in any way there is no restriction about these African Game Reserves which stretch across hundreds of miles of wild country and in no way make you think of National Parks or kindred places where wild animals are more or less on show to masses of gaping tourists. That is their charm; they are simply tracts of virgin bush treated as sanctuaries for the game.

But we were travelling too quickly for my liking. Soon we had left the game behind and were crossing the Nyiri desert, infinitely smaller than the northern deserts over which I had journeyed but infinitely more desolate, for here was no deep golden sand, no out-cropping of black rock, but a colourless waste that ran dully to the horizon. I searched the sky ahead for sight of Kilimanjaro, the giant who towers above Moshi, but could see nothing except banks of cloud.

“You won’t get so much as a squint at him this morning,” said Fatty. “He’s got the sulks and is hiding every one of his almost 20,000 feet. But you’ll know you’re nearing him when we reach his foot-hills.”

We did. We bumped until our teeth chattered in our heads, and through gaps in the clouds we had horrifying glimpses of dense forest, of bubbling white waterfalls, of tangled undergrowth. A frightening place, this forest which clung so tenaciously to the feet of Africa’s highest mountain, a place of hidden dangers, and twisting liane creeper, and huge distorted trees. Suppose we crashed into it?

I shut my eyes firmly until we reached Moshi, and crawled out on to a dusty field plastered with “No Smoking while Refuelling” notices. “Fine spot this,” said the depressed small man, taking the wool from his ears. “Over seven hundred white people.”

I wasn’t interested: the seven hundred odd were, because

they had all come to inspect us. They stood up in cars and lorries, they leaned over fences, they craned their necks out of nearby windows, they made audible and un-congratulatory remarks. I sat morosely in the lee of the hangar and wished the aerodrome would open and swallow me. Somewhere in the back of my "classically stupid" brain was dawning the conviction that Africa ought to be the African's country. I said so to Fatty. "You're too hard on them. You don't have to live in Moshi."

There was a lot in that. When you live in a remote part of the world where you have nothing to do except struggle with nature's vagaries, count the money you've lost, and avoid tropical ailments, you develop a positive longing to see a new white face—and scratch it.

We flew on over Tanganyika, a grim, barren land of bare hills and rocky plateau, and swamps where herds of elephant obligingly trampled up and down for our delectation. To my horror they were *pink*! Could this be just retribution for the consumption of hard liquor at ungodly hours in Alexandria and Nairobi? Fatty put me out of my misery. "The mud is red here, and they not only splash it up over their bodies but squirt it at each other through their trunks."

I sat back relievedly.

After the elephant there were no further excitements. We rose high to clear the mountains and droned on through the hot, bright morning. I slept and awakened to a sharp nudge from the depressed small man. "You're landing me here," he said proudly. "See our polo ground."

Sleepily I stared down at a large sandy patch set in the middle of nowhere. It seemed an extraordinary place for a polo ground to be, but I hadn't the heart to say so as my companion was so thrilled. As we circled to earth about six other small depressed men scurried on to the aerodrome, chattering loudly, and when we had taken off once more I said to Fatty, "Who, and when, and why?"

"Barmy," he replied dispassionately. "There are quite

a lot of them. They've built a house and run it as a Country Club. They're all retired."

I stared at the landscape. "Retired from what?"

He thrust his hand out to feel the wind, touched the controls and sent us soaring up to ten thousand feet. "God knows," he said.

The machine swayed, and slithered and bucketed. Fatty sat as negligently as his cramped position would allow and read the *Bystander*, while I looked apprehensively at his back. Of course, he was a marvellous pilot, and the plane had a George, and everything was all right, but . . . I told myself fiercely that I was a fool and pulled out a book to read.

Strangely enough, fear did not last. Within the next hour and a half Fatty and I had exchanged the five illustrated papers we had between us and eaten half a pound of acid drops.

We came down to Dodoma for lunch. "The second last town in Africa," Fatty informed me gravely.

I looked around and felt so subdued I forbore to ask what the last town was like. Dodoma was a collection of decrepit buildings which appeared quite lifeless. There was a railway—once more to Dar-es-Salaam, a few ancient railway carriages, a dump of discarded motor-cars and lorries, and a few patches of millet. Surrounding this paradise crouched a dozen or so enormous rocky hills, bare of all vegetation. I said in a small voice, "They told me there was a famous Lion Rock here. Which is it?"

Fatty waved his hand. "Any of 'em."

That was the effect Dodoma had on us. We trailed through sandy grass to a rest-house where sad-looking natives in white robes and white cotton gloves served us with a remarkably good lunch. But even that didn't cheer us; Dodoma sat on us like a pall. Why I know not, but the place reminded me of a graveyard. "Aren't there any white settlers here?" I asked the ground staff.

"Oh, yes, and miners. Mostly Germans, and they work like moles."

I wondered whether this busyness was an effort to convince the Führer that the spirit of the Fatherland was still strong, or whether it was an attempt to show the British Government how much Empire rule was appreciated; then I gave up wondering. Imagination simply didn't function in Dodoma. It was a relief to leave it and its abominable rocks and to soar south-west through clear air scanning the fresh collection of papers we had picked up at the rest-house.

\*

"If I didn't read," said Fatty, "I'd risk falling asleep."

I remembered my unkind thoughts of the morning and felt humble. Once a week this man flew from Kisumu to Lusaka and back over some of the worst flying country in the continent, carrying passengers and mails. To me such a journey was an adventure: to him it was a thing become so familiar that it was deadly dull. And if he didn't read . . . Hastily I handed him a fresh *Tatler*.

We bumped on over a lot more mountains and came into sight of a wide and pleasant plain marred by the furrows and dumps and ridges which marked the Lupa goldfields. Here alluvial gold is found and here, therefore, were the things which the very smell of gold brings in its train. In Mbeya town nearby stolid Germans ran hotels, food stores, shops of all kinds for the mixed crowd who came in from the mines. Americans, Canadians, Englishmen, half-breeds of varying tints, Africans from the Cape, the Congo, Kenya, Nyasaland and the Rhodesias, men who were genuine miners and men who were tempted by the lure of easy money and men who followed gold merely because it gave them the chance to swindle some companion who had wrested a glittering prize from the earth—all these and more visited Mbeya. Its one street, its European hotel and its shops smelt of unwashed humanity. I was glad to escape to the airways rest-house five miles away where we were to spend the night.

If ever I have time I should like to spend several weeks at Mbeya rest-house. White-walled and thatched-roofed, it is built around three sides of a courtyard where scarlet poinsettias riot showily, and it looks out so peacefully across a broad green valley to the hills which lie between it and Lake Nyasa. Its host is a Scot from Fife with a sense of humour, and the warmth in his lilting voice when he greets you brings a lump of homesickness into your throat. Its servants are round-eyed, soft-footed Nyasaland boys, and its food, despite the fact that practically all stores have to be brought by road from the railhead at Dodoma two hundred and sixteen miles away, is excellent.

The air is crisp and cool. It makes you want to climb the mountains in order to find the lakes which rest in the cups between their peaks, and to walk for miles through the high, waving grass of the valley, and to hunt the game in the wild country that runs north to Lake Rukwa. Oh, yes, there is plenty to do at Mbeya rest-house, unless you choose December or January for your visit, because then the rains cover it like a grey blanket.

For myself, I watched an incredibly beautiful sunset and then wandered to a famous small lake which boasts the legend that the many crocodiles in it are so sated with fish that they allow bathers to use their home with impunity. It certainly looked a placid sheet of water but as I gazed at it something like a lump of wood poked above the surface. It wasn't wood. It had a wicked eye and a set of the cruellest teeth imaginable. Walking back through air grown suddenly chill I disbelieved the legend.

"I doubt there'll be a ground frost to-night," said my host.

I drew up my chair close to the roaring log fire, remembered Kisumu, and murmured drowsily that that would be nice. We talked of Scotland, and of the bland way people at home thought how pleasant it would be to hand Tanganyika back to Hitler and thus save a European war, and we

listened to Big Ben and the news on the wireless, and we ate a superbly cooked five-course dinner off a polished table which held great bowls of carnations from the Scot's pet patch of garden.

Sipping Kenya coffee, I said, "I've been in some odd places, but I've never been in one so remote and known such comfort."

"Lassie," answered the Scot. "That's the secret of our success as colonisers. We *do* like our comforts."

The head-boy came in carrying an enormous alarm clock which his master wound and set for five o'clock. "But you'll not leave till six," he told me kindly.

I dreamed of the Führer cutting a wedge out of a large cake labelled Central Africa and awakened to a furious noise which I presently realised was our plane being warmed up. I had a bath in peaty water, drank tea and nibbled biscuits, felt queerly excited. In two hours I should reach Shiwa Ngandu.

But as we waved good-bye to the Scot and flew south-west across the border into Northern Rhodesia, I felt suddenly nervous. After all, eight in the morning was a vicious hour at which to arrive anywhere. Maybe the letter announcing the date of my coming had not reached its destination? Perhaps the landing-ground was miles from the house? Or the family would all be asleep?

To add to my misery it was a cloudy morning and I could see nothing below us except white puff-balls. It was chilly too, at the height we were flying, and my world seemed to consist of nothing but my shivers and Fatty's broad back. With absurd absence of logic I fumed alternately at the length of our journey and at the thought of reaching the end of it so soon.

"Hi!" called Fatty. "Look down."

Through a gap in the clouds I had my first sight of Shiwa lake.

It shone pearly far below me; then the clouds rolled

over it and Fatty dipped and curvettet among them.  
"There are hills all round; I don't know if I dare land you."

Perversely, I was furious. He *had* to land me.

For fully twenty minutes we circled wildly. Hills loomed out of the mist, came frighteningly close, receded again. Several times I saw the lake and squeaked, but before the squeak was fully born it had disappeared once more. "No go," said Fatty lugubriously. "I'll have to take you on to Mpika, it's only sixty-five miles ahead."

Only sixty-five miles! I glowered at his back.

We flew southwards and suddenly he shouted to me, "The cloud-bank ends here. I'll see if I can turn and come back underneath it."

The next minute we dived through white mist and emerged into a ravine between the hills which widened until we were above a wide valley. I saw a lime grove and nearly fell out of the plane. We did a terrific series of contortions and bumped happily along the landing-ground towards a group of people.

I had reached Shiwa Ngandu.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SUN IN CAPRICORN

#### I

THE green valley of the soldier's dream lay in sunshine, for the clouds which had been so reluctant to let me land had disappeared. Against a wooded hillside a tall house glowed rosily and before it and around it was colour, colour, colour. Great flame-trees holding scarlet cups to an azure sky, orange-trees laden with golden globes, rainbow-hued birds that darted through clear air, masses of purple bougainvillea, beds of red and yellow canna lilies, borders of pink and white and cyclamen petunias, clumps of vivid blue delphiniums, tall dark cypresses casting violet shadows on a dusty pinkish drive, silvery eucalyptus trees.

I thought stupidly, "It can't be real," and tumbled out of the car to be seized by an embarrassment more acute than I have ever known because an army of house-boys gathered by the steps knelt at my approach and clapped their hands. "*Mapoleni, Mama!*!" they chanted, "*Mapoleni!*!" and their white teeth flashed in beaming smiles.

Surely no welcome could so warm a traveller's heart! It was so genuine, so eager. Almost I curtsied to them and a contented feeling crept through me. I was going to like the Bemba tribe.

James, the head-boy, stepped forward and took the case and the typewriter in either hand.

"James will look after you."

The remark proved a gross understatement. During my stay James was to be my guide, tutor, parent and lady's maid; but at that first meeting I regarded him curiously. Taller than most of the Bemba, who are a smallish, wiry race, he had a dignified, fine-featured face which bore little

trace of negroid ancestry and a neat moustache decorated his upper lip. Suddenly he smiled at me and his brown eyes lit up. "I will take the *Mama* to her room."

The house was very cool, with lofty ceilings, red-tiled floors, smooth polished furniture of some dark wood, and it was built around a shady courtyard where bushy pink and blue hydrangeas grew in large green tubs. My room was enormous, semi-circular in shape, with windows set in deep arches. Here James showed definitely that I was his charge. "I will unpack."

Always I have hated people doing my unpacking, but before the grave politeness of this man I simply nodded and watched him while he stowed my garments away in a gigantic press. "And now," he said courteously, "I will wash your feet."

All my native inhibitions rose up and shook their fists at me. No, I really could not let James wash my feet. I said so as gently as I could and he made no demur, but looked a little crestfallen. "Breakfast at nine. You want me, you ring the bell three times." His bare feet swished across the tiled floor and he closed the door quietly behind him.

I sat down wearily in an armchair and felt a pig. I was also conscious for the first time of the feeling which attacks people after long air journeys. The room, the house, the flame-trees beyond the windows were all see-sawing up and down in the most unaccountable manner, and my legs felt rather as though they were made of cotton wool.

There was a faint rustle and I looked round. A girl had sidled into the room and was standing with her back to the door. Against the dark wood all I could see of her was a brilliant smile and a white blouse, but presently she raised a dim arm upon which multitudes of copper bangles glinted, and pointed to her chest. "Aggeness," she said.

I grinned feebly. "Did you want something?"

She giggled and pirouetted forward, her black skirt swirling round her shapely ankles. "Ahhh!" she stroked the

sleeve of my frock, then she patted my hair and waltzed across to the dressing-table. Pots of face-cream with shiny lids intrigued her and she played happily with these for a few minutes, but when she opened the press to admire my clothes I said firmly, "I want to change. Go away."

"Aggeness," she giggled again.

I talked, I gesticulated, I held the door open. Undismayed, Aggeness continued to dance about the room, poking her toes into my slippers, examining the typewriter, shaking her slim body in glee at sight of her reflection in my hand-mirror. I cursed my lack of Chibemba but refused to allow myself to ring three times for the faithful James. Surely there must be some method whereby I could rid myself of Aggeness without loss of countenance? I tried her with Russian swear-s, English endearments, French terms of contempt, even the few doubtful phrases of Swahili I had picked up from the Lioness—but she clearly looked upon me as an entrancing entertainment devised for her benefit. As I changed and washed she stood still, hands clasped to her breast, eyes rolling with interest, and then she lifted my discarded clothes and crooned to them, cradling them in her arms as she skipped from door to dressing-table. To one disgruntled by four and a half days of kaleidoscopic living there was something exasperating about her gay insouciance. Then I happened to pass close to a window and forgot Aggeness, for at the far end of a cypress avenue was a sheet of purest sapphire—the lake of Shiwa Ngandu.

Over breakfast I said, "The house is Italy or Spain: the view is Africa. How did you do it?"

They said simply, "We made it."

From the ant-hills which abounded in the bush they had dug red clay, fashioned it into bricks, dried these in the sun and then stacked them into kilns for firing. The white clay beds down by the Manshia river had provided the material for tiles. The trees had given the wood which the carpenters had used for rafters, panelling and furniture.

Everything in that large house bar cement, glass, curtains, bedding, and a few minor oddments came from the estate and was the workmanship of the Bemba.

"But the architecture, the planning?" I said.

"Well, we just planned it ourselves."

Very dimly I began to realise one thousandth part of the energy and courage required to form a self-supporting community in a remote part of Africa peopled by a raw and formerly fighting tribe. The nearest railhead was at Broken Hill, some four hundred miles away, and between it and Shiwa squirmed an extraordinary track euphemistically known as the "Great North Road" along which a lorry manned by a white driver and a desperado from the Seychelles called Leopold jolted, or did not jolt according to the weather, about once a fortnight. Freights were terrific, as was but natural, and the petrol which came from Abercorn at the southern end of Lake Tanganyika cost five shillings a gallon. Certainly there was Mpika, only sixty-five miles away, from which place came food for the mind in the shape of air-mail, but what about food for the body?

I knew the answer before they told me. "All home-grown."

They had their own sheep, cattle, dairy, fowls, vegetables, grains and fruits, and a native hunter to shoot the game. "We'll show you everything," they promised, "but first come and see the view from the loggia."

The loggia was built above my room, but in its deep-arched windows there was no glass. I sat on a wide sill and stared out at the valley which sloped gently to a lake no longer sapphire but turquoise against the dark hills which sheltered it from the east. Orange groves and lime groves of a rich green spattered with gold; soft bluish blurs that were eucalyptus plantations; little groups of brown mushrooms that were native villages; and just below me the bright mosaic that was the garden. Towards me, along an avenue of jacaranda trees, walked several Bemba women,

some with babies slung on their backs, all with baskets of grain on their heads. They had the superb carriage of the African, and as they laughed and chattered together the sun shone full on their gay print dresses, their smooth black faces, their slim waving arms. On the terrace a small boy squatted beside a big drum, placed his hands palm downwards and began to beat it, first softly, then with a rhythmic thud-thud which echoed in the far hills.

I left the window reluctantly. These two who were my hosts had not made a self-supporting community: they had created paradise.

## II

My desire to explore paradise led me to forgetfulness of the inertia which overtakes muscles after a sedentary winter in England and of the fact that Shiwa stood over 5,000 feet above sea-level. The altitude, I thought a shade scornfully, was to the denizens of the Northern Rhodesian plateau what the line was to the inhabitants of Kisumu—an excuse for various weaknesses. As for the muscles, well, they would soon regain the elasticity they had lost.

Optimistic as usual.

I have a shrewd suspicion that the *Bwana* knew what acrobatics were going on behind as I followed him round during those first days at Shiwa, but he kindly refrained from turning his head and marched steadily on while I floundered after. We walked along roads ankle-deep in sand, we splashed through fords, we tramped through the bush, we crawled over rocks, we negotiated bridges, we slithered in swamps. More than once I was reduced to crawling on all fours, hoping against hope that no Bemba was witnessing such degradation, and when I came to a rushing stream spanned by a single and very slippery log I flung pride to the winds, straddled the wretched thing and wriggled my way across it, with the result that the shoulder-straps of my petticoat tore and I struggled on with

a billow of pink about my feet. The *Bwana* noticed that bit. "Step out of it and carry it on your arm," he advised kindly.

Going up hills I wheezed like a broken-winded horse. "The altitude."

I said, "Damn the altitude," and panted on.

By the end of my first day I was in sorry state. My feet were a mass of blisters, my arms were aching and burnt by the sun, my legs were covered with scratches, and I was atrociously stiff. It was then that James began to take me in hand. Armed with a bottle of methylated spirit, a wad of cotton wool and a pair of the *Bwana*'s bedroom slippers he ministered to my poor feet, then chivvied me along to the bathroom. When I returned to my room I found a log-fire crackling in the big fire-place and a huge glass of orange-juice on the little table beside my bed.

"You will lie down for an hour," said James, and added cheerfully, "before dinner you will have whisky. You will be all right."

I lay down meekly. He tucked the eiderdown round me as you would tuck it round a child, and began to move about the room putting things straight, bundling up the clothes I had worn for the wash-boys, tidying the papers I had scattered on the desk. As he worked he talked to me in his soft careful English. He had looked after many white people because he had wandered far from his native village during the past fifteen years and he had had much training as a house-servant. In Bulawayo he had been a waiter in the hotel, but always he had hankered after his own people and his own country, and one day when the *Bwana* had walked in and begun speaking of the Bemba his nostalgia for home had become so acute that it almost choked him. Not that he disliked the wider life of the Southern Rhodesian town. He enjoyed the cinema, and wearing a dress suit, and eating European food, and having water which ran from taps—hot or cold as you desired, but these delights faded suddenly

beside his overwhelming longing for home. Within a month he had started on the long journey north and had arrived at Shiwa to ask for work. "Now I am happy," he finished. "I am with my own people, and that means much to a man who has travelled even to Basutoland."

"Basutoland?" I echoed. "Why did you go there?"

He paused and waved an explanatory hand. "Well, at that time I had a Basutoland wife."

Clearly, James was a man of parts. As the *Bwana* said afterwards, imagine asking an Englishman why he visited Italy and receiving the answer, "Ah, at that time I had an Italian wife."

But James went serenely on. "I have a good wife now, very kind, very sensible. Our little girl is three years old. Perhaps you will take our photographs? I should like us to wear our best clothes because I already have such a picture of my last wife, myself, and a little boy who died."

"Was that the Basutoland wife?"

"Oh, no," said James, and moved towards the door. "To-morrow the *Bwana* says we may go an expedition across the lake."

After he had gone I lay back on my pillows, rested in body but agitated in mind. My ignorance of the African was complete, and James upset any preconceived ideas of him I had gained from white men who knew the continent or from books. It was desperately necessary, I felt, that I should become acquainted not only with him but with others of the Bemba tribe, for unless I tried hard to know them, to see their viewpoint, to understand their laws and customs, then my journey would be in vain. But *how* to know them? In other countries there had been bonds of various kinds—birth, or some mutual interest. Always there had been a common language. That was the rub with the Bemba. I could not talk with them in their own tongue and, with the exception of James and one or two others, they knew no English. Besides, even James would

not tell me in English the things I wished to know. It was a vexing problem which obscured my sight of paradise, and pondering it I fell asleep.

When I awakened James was standing at the foot of my bed. "Six o'clock," he said. "The *Bwana* tells me you are writing a book. Is it about black people?"

"Yes."

"That is very wise," his voice was tranquil. "There is no use coming to Africa to write a book about white people; you can do that in England."

"I know. But it is difficult to write a book about people to whom I cannot speak."

"I interpret," he said a little proudly, "but there is no need for speech if you like the black people."

He did not realise it, but there was all truth in that remark.

### III

On the far side of the valley they were building a guest-house. On trestles above the porch swarmed a group of masons. Below them David, the *capitao*, strode to and fro exhorting them to further efforts. He looked very well in his navy-blue jersey and shorts, and the tassel on his black fez swung valiantly as he greeted us.

"The house must be finished this day week," said the *Bwana*.

I stared apprehensively at the skeleton roof, the windowless rooms which were still filled with rubble, the uneven clay floors; but David grinned. "*È Mukwai, È Mukwai!*!"

As this expression was the equivalent of "Yes, sir," I couldn't see the force of it at first, but very soon I learnt that it was an elastic phrase meaning "Fancy that!" "You don't say so!" "Certainly, it shall be done," or whatever meaning you chose to put upon it by changing your intonation. So David pranced up and down under the hot sun, chanting his "*È Mukwai!*" and the masons chattered loudly

as they pointed the porch, and on the rungs of a tall ladder piccanins squatted, tossing tiles airily over their shoulders from one to another, and the building of the house went on at such speed that you blinked as you watched.

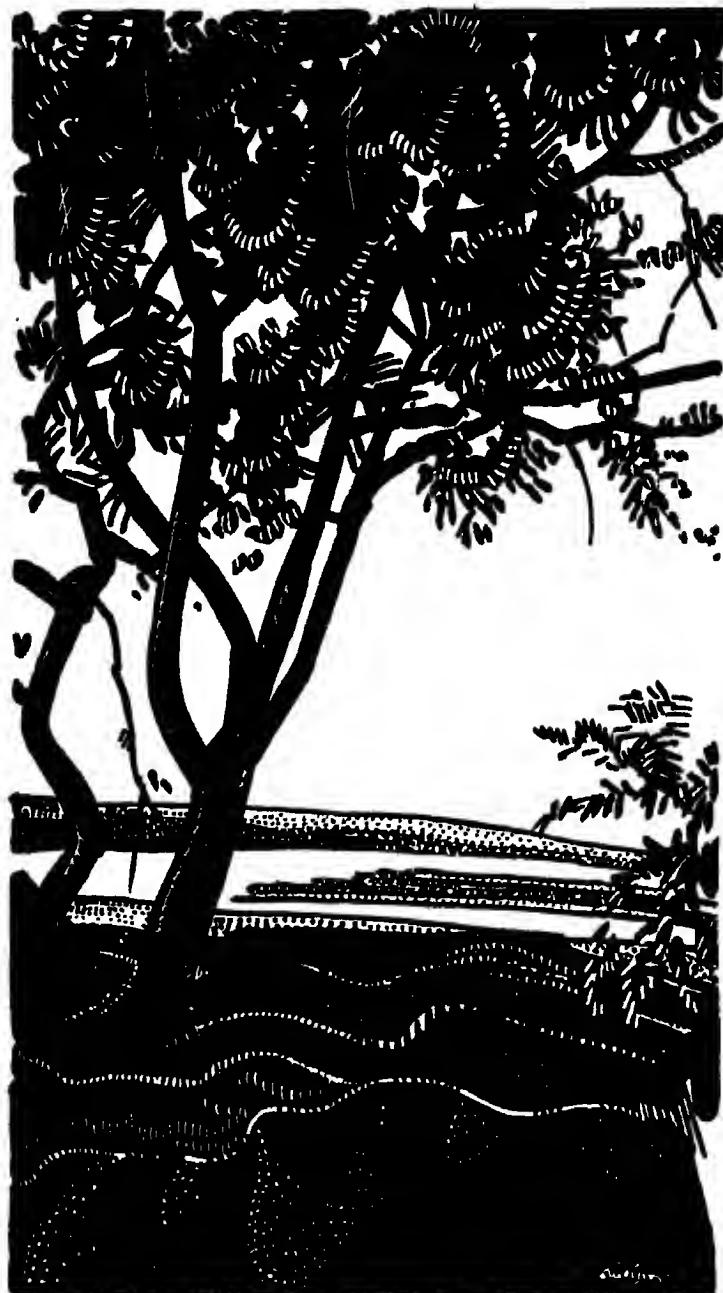
“*Ticketis*,” said David, and swept off his fez, disclosing a pile of greasy cards.

The *ticketis* presented difficulties. There was one for each worker, and on it the *Bwana* had to put a cross against every day of employment, a simple matter until it was borne in upon you that the Bemba were adepts at multiplication. To them one week might just as easily be two—think of the added fourpence per diem you might thereby earn!

Unfortunately the *Bwana* did more than think; he asked the most searching questions as to where each man or boy had been on such and such a date. In answer David and his henchmen waxed lyrical. They performed such a pantomime in gesture that even I could follow their arguments. One man, I gathered, had taken the day off in order to tend his children as his wife was ill, another had laboured longer hours than ever man had done before, a third had definitely worked for four weeks, not three.

It was a lovely game. The natives knew every move in it and played it with the eagerness of children, their excuses growing more and more absurd, while the *Bwana* smiled and marked the cards as he thought fit. Nobody minded this dashing of high hope; indeed, everyone nodded wisely as though in tribute to such acumen. “If we can’t get away with it to-day,” their gestures implied, “perhaps we shall to-morrow.”

Presently I wandered round to the piccanins’ ladder where one jovial child, wishful of airing his English, immediately shouted “Come on” to his fellows. He was a nice scrap in a very tattered shirt of many colours and throughout my stay he never once forgot to greet me with his war-cry, but this particular morning he and his small companions simply could not take their eyes off me. To them a new



SHIWA LAKE



white *mama* was as exciting as an elephant to me, and they herded together on their ladder like a group of bright-eyed monkeys, watching my every movement.

"Come along," said the *Bwana*. "We must go to the still."

But I was worrying about the guest-house. "It can't possibly be finished in a week?"

"Finished and furnished."

I walked down the sandy road thinking over this remark. Near London, where a telephone call could bring you anything from bricks to a settee, the mere idea of completing such a house in a week would be dismissed as ludicrous: in tropical Africa, where local labour had to supply not only workmanship but each article necessary for that workmanship, the matter was simple. The whole thing seemed incongruous, but I could not argue about it because above me was a cloudless sky, and before me stretched a miraculous lake, and all around me was the scent of orange blossom, for beside us walked a procession of women and children balancing great baskets of the waxy white flowers on their heads.

The scent was overpowering and the heat intense in the long shed where the blossom was made into essential oil. Little boys darted hither and thither with wood from the great pile in the yard; men flung wide the boiler doors and rammed huge logs into the fierce flames; more men balanced lightly on the narrow boards which ran above the still, tipping the fragrant flowers into the vats, oiling machinery, testing the myriad pipes. I stared dubiously at the sodden mass which was all that was left of beauty when the still had done its work. Paradise had to be made to pay for itself, and the essential oils from orange, lime and eucalyptus were its greatest asset, but it seemed a horrid end for those cented loads we had watched being carried down the hill. Feeling sentimental I walked across the yard to a basket of golden limes, lifted one and held it to my nose. It had a

fresh, pungent smell. All morning I held it in my hand, sniffing it at intervals.

Near the still was the blacksmith's forge, where two men bent over the anvil hammering slim iron bars which were to form a wrought-iron gate. Beside them was a similar gate sent out from England, and this they were copying with extraordinary faithfulness. Eagerly they showed me their work, woolly heads nodding, white teeth flashing, shining black arms waving. Certainly they had cause for pride. Five brief years ago they had never seen an anvil, never touched an iron bar; now they were making a gate of which any white blacksmith might be proud.

"But sometimes," warned the *Bwana*, "they have 'off-days,' nobody knows why."

And as we left the yard we came across an aged man who was definitely enjoying an "off day." His job was to cut and polish a slate slab for the washstand in a new bedroom just built on to the house. Twice he had cut his slate, twice he had broken it and now he sat cross-legged on the ground gazing sorrowfully at yet a third broken piece.

The *Bwana* seized his shoulder and shook him—no ordinary shake but an effort which nearly lost the old man his few remaining teeth and made me hop fearfully in the background. "You will cut another bit of slate and this time you *will not* spoil it! Now tell me, what will you dream about to-night?"

The ancient rolled his eyes and grinned. "The horn of the rhinoceros, *Bwana*."

So I discovered the sense of humour of the Bemba. There were no excuses, no malice born of the shake, simply that extraordinarily apt answer which reduced both the *Bwana* and himself to helpless mirth—and the following morning a beautiful and whole piece of slate was delivered to the house.

## IV

At two o'clock precisely James knocked on my door, a resplendent figure in palest grey flannel, black patent-leather shoes and a Homburg hat. "The expedition," he said gravely. "Will the *Mama* ride a donkey or a *jinga*?"

My experience of Shiwa donkeys was brief but thorough. They were large, spirited beasts possessing none of the usual attributes of their breed but a remarkable affinity to a Russian mule of which I held unhappy memory. Definitely not a donkey. But a *jinga*? I peered round the courtyard in search of some frightening and unknown animal until James solemnly wheeled a very squeaky bicycle into view.

"Oh, dear, can't I walk?"

Decorously but firmly James vetoed this suggestion.

We set off gingerly down the jacaranda avenue. Bicycling has never been my forte, and the agony I endured trying to steer that wretched *jinga* over stones, sand-ruts and the bush which sprouted so arrogantly from the middle of the path is indescribable. James rode serenely behind me until I could bear it no longer. "Go in front," I told him severely. "You make me nervous."

He went in front, sighing over the idiosyncrasies of strange white *mamas* while I pedalled behind cursing the politeness of the Bemba who sprang, every man, woman and child of them, out of the bush to greet me. "*Mapoleni, Mama, Mapoleni!*"

I wobbled madly past them, trying to keep my grip on the handlebars, bow graciously, and remember the words courtesy demanded I say in reply. The sun beat down on my back, my knees seemed to fill the horizon, the stones in the path became boulders. And all the time James rode so easily before me, throwing conversational remarks over his shoulder. Had I seen the frangipanni trees? Did I notice the dispensary on my left? What was my opinion of the new huts the *Bwana* had just put up? Somehow we reached

the haven of the aerodrome and I was beginning to gain some control over my *jinga* when James destroyed my new-found peace by saying, "You only fell off four times, that is not so bad."

I made a face at his back and fell off for the fifth time—into a bush of black-jacks.<sup>1</sup> Unaware that hundreds of long spikes had attached themselves to my skirt I remounted, gave a loud yelp, and cannoned violently into James, who dismounted without losing one trace of dignity and proceeded to pick the thorns from my garments.

"It might have been ants," he said kindly.

And I had called the place paradise!

We left the pleasant flatness of the aerodrome and rode on along a narrow squiggly path which squelched beneath our tyres. Presently James stopped. "The proper road was washed away in the last rains. We leave the *jingas* here and walk across the swamps."

I looked at the swamps and developed a sudden passion for my nasty *jinga* for ahead of us, as far as we could see, were tall, razor-edged reeds between which little pools covered with mauve and white water-lilies shone blue in the sunlight.

James wheeled the bicycles into the bush. "Now we go by the bridges."

The bridges were large, and in many cases rotten logs flung negligently down on the reeds, and negotiating their slippery surfaces was a nightmare. Half-way across them we reached a hummock of more or less solid ground on which I sat down firmly, much to James's disgust until I guilefully offered him a cigarette. (The Bemba, although their habit is to grow tobacco and grind the dried leaves into snuff, are incapable of refusing a cigarette.)

So we smoked in amity, and I forgot my aching muscles and thought only of the beauty of the lake that glittered beyond the reeds and the superb flight of the wild geese

<sup>1</sup> Black-jack. A bush studded with innumerable spikes resembling very sharp and tough pine needles.

which skimmed above our heads. From a pool just beside me a diving eagle soared and I watched him, open-mouthed, as he hovered directly over me. "James, what has he got in his beak?"

"A water-snake, *Mama*, very poisonous."

I shut my mouth abruptly. If that wriggling horror had dropped?

"Here," James went on, "Dr. Livingstone crossed this end of the lake. He was a very brave man; the Bemba liked him. But he was very sad on this journey because his little dog was drowned."

I remembered *The Last Journals*,<sup>1</sup> which I had just been reading.

". . . We went along a rivulet till it ended in a small lake, Mapampa or Chimbwé (Shiwa), about five miles long, and one and a half broad. It had hippopotami, and the *poku* fed on its banks. . . . We had to cross the Chimbwé at its eastern end, where it is fully a mile wide. The guide refused to show another and narrower ford up the stream, which emptied into it from the east; and I, being the first to cross, neglected to give orders about the poor little dog, Chitané. The water was waist deep, the bottom soft peaty stuff with deep holes in it, and the northern side infested by leeches. The boys were—like myself—all too much engaged with preserving their balance to think of the spirited little beast, and he must have swam till he sank. He was so useful in keeping all the country curs off our huts; none dared to approach and steal, and he never stole himself. He shared the staring of the people with his master, then in the march he took charge of the whole party running to the front, and again to the rear, to see that all was right. He was becoming yellowish-red in colour; and, poor thing, perished in what the boys all call Chitané's water."

<sup>1</sup> David Livingstone, *The Last Journals*, Vol. I.

All through this country from Kasama to Mpika, from Serenje to that derelict road that runs to the memorial at Chitembe, I was to remember David Livingstone and to marvel at the courage which urged a broken body through journeys which might well have defeated the strongest of men. He and Cecil Rhodes, the Scotsman of stern faith and the visionary of amazing temperament: these two men had conquered Tropical Africa more surely than any army could have done, yet now, a mere handful of years after their passing, their successors made idiotic blunders in government and an American air-line planned tours for gaping sightseers to Livingstone's tomb.

Into my fierce thoughts James's voice came soothingly. "He buried the poodle-dog, Chitané, on that bare hill over there, and we call the hill by that name. Sometimes at night we hear barking, and the *Mama* says, 'That is the *mipashi* (spirit) of Chitané,' but we do not quite believe that because we think it is a barking snake."

I came down to earth with a bang. "Snakes can't bark?"

"Oh, yes, *Mama*. Once the barking was so loud that the *Bwana* came out with a gun and a torch. I asked him not to shine the torch on the place from which the bark was coming and he was very angry."

I rose and plodded on over the logs but now, remembering Livingstone, my foothold was more sure, and I hoped desperately that the *Mama* was right and the Bemba wrong; the barking of Chitané's *mipashi* was so much more pleasant than the barking of a snake.<sup>1</sup>

On the far side of the swamps we struck a fairly good path which led us past several native "gardens," an optimistic name for sad-looking patches of millet, cassava (tapioca), ground-nuts and tall Kaffir-corn or maize which always intrigued me. Anything less like the ordinary conception of a garden could not be imagined, but James proudly

<sup>1</sup> This belief in barking snakes is very strong amongst the Bemba and, although no such reptile has ever been found, they insist that it exists.

showed me a stunted bush which would bear "sweet and lovely" fruit in the springtime, and a few withered banana palms. "My smaller mother grows these," he said.

I blinked. "How could you have a smaller mother?"

The explanation, when I had sorted it out from a long and involved speech, was interesting. The Bemba were originally a matrilineal tribe, the reigning Chitimukulu being succeeded first by his brothers, then by his sister's sons, ultimately, perhaps, by so-called "grandsons," the children of his sister's daughters. All through the tribe this female succession persisted, and to James his mother's sister was far too important a person to be designated as "aunt." She was, very definitely, a kind of lesser edition of his mother and, as such, entitled to veneration.

It was difficult, however, to reconcile this matriarchal adoration with the tribesman's everyday life. Indeed, to the casual observer, the Bemba women seemed to be relegated to the background. They took no visible part in village discussions, they ate only after their husbands had finished their meal, their standard of intelligence appeared in every way to be lower than that of the male. Yet behind this apparent humility there was a real and deep power wielded by mothers, aunts, mothers-in-law, cousins—by all female relatives. European influences had hidden that power, had given the men of the tribe more outward say in matters of moment; but if one struck below the surface of Bemba life one came up against matrilineal kinship, a strong, subterranean river which swept all modern changes to limbo on its wide breast. On the day when James first spoke to me about this smaller mother I had but a vague idea of that underground stream, but as I travelled among and talked to the Bemba I grew ever more conscious of its power.

On this afternoon we were going to visit Paul, the husband of the smaller mother, a lay preacher of note and an authority on the Bemba history, and as we skirted the gardens James

told me of this man's learning. "He has so many books that they fill seven shelves," he said, "and he has read every one of them."

When we reached the village and were ushered ceremoniously into a most superior brick hut, I was a little disappointed in Paul's library. Arrayed on rough shelves were a sheaf of ancient *British Weeklies*, four calendars with mottoes for each day in the year, *Peep of Day*, and a copy of *The Sheik*. Paul himself was a tall, grave man in a spotless white suit, who made a wonderful oration about how honoured he was I had graced his humble abode with a visit. Somehow I couldn't take to him. The castor-oil his lesser brethren rubbed into their skins seemed to have penetrated his mind. His manner was too suave, his words too insincere, and his parrot-like eulogy of the missionaries who had educated him made me squirm on my hard stool which had been placed by the window in the full glare of the sun. This long recital wasn't at all what I wanted, and at last I said so.

"But your history? Tell me about the Bemba's journey from the Congo?"

The deprecatory smile disappeared. The coat came off—literally and figuratively—and the real Paul emerged from European mumbo-jumbo. For the next two hours I sat entranced while he poured out stories of the tribe. The walls of the hut fell away and I was voyaging across Lake Bangweolu with that first Chitimukulu who waged war against the Angoni and the Bisa tribes, and who led his peoples through untold hardship to the promised land of the plateau. With him I waited breathlessly in Lubemba while messengers were sent back to Lubaland in order to snatch *nkashi yesu* (our sister) from the clutches of the parent tribe who still held her. Without *nkashi yesu*, potential mother of future chiefs, Chitimukulu could not carry on—and he knew it, so the messengers stole the lady most guilefully and, pursued by fierce vengeance, brought her safely to Lubemba

after several hairbreadth escapes from capture. Rejoicing at her arrival was so great that ceremonial rites were performed throughout the land, and Chitimukulu prostrated himself on the ground and prayed "to our mothers who bore us and suckled us and carried us in skins on their backs," while the lady's flour-basket, the contents of which had presumably sustained her during her travels, was placed with much pomp in the chief's relic house.

Paul told me too of Lesa, the spirit of the air, the deity who has in her keeping the destinies of all ancestral spirits. To the pregnant woman Lesa is all-important, for she alone can decide whether an unborn child shall be animated by *mipashi* (spirits of those who have died honourable deaths), or *fiwa* (spirits of those who have died violent, unjust or self-inflicted deaths). If *fiwa* enter into a child then his whole life is ruined, for he grows up into a wicked and sinful man shunned by his tribe.

There were other stories. Tales of the sacred fire, legends of the sacrifices made of cattle to dead ancestors and of the placing of beer, clothes, beads and so forth at *nfuba* (tiny shrines to the dead made of twigs in the shape of miniature wigwams), more tales of Mulenga, the god of hunting, and of the *nganga*, the witch-doctors, who take their instructions direct from Lesa and brew horrid concoctions from trees.

When Paul paused I asked him if all these rites and beliefs were still prevalent.

"Oh, yes, *Mama*."

"But you are a Christian and you told me earlier this afternoon that you have many converts among your people?"

"Ah." All expression died from his face. He reached for his white coat and put it on, and with the gesture he changed back into the oily individual of two hours before. "Christianity is very wonderful," he mouthed. "Wait, and I will show you all my testimonials from the missionaries."

They were certainly excellent testimonials. As I read them the smaller mother sidled in and whispered to James.

"Please, *Mama*, she asks if you will kindly take a photograph of Paul, herself and their boy."

The boy was imbecile. He was wrapped in a blanket and all that could be seen of him was a huge lolling head and a pair of stick-like legs, but watching Paul as he fussed gently over his pathetic son I repented of my unkind thoughts. For all his apparent insincerity there was something fine about the man. He held the child in his arms and explained, "He has a little trouble with his head but it will pass, it *must* pass!" Then he posed himself stiffly and beckoned the smaller mother to stand beside him.

We walked slowly through the village and I almost fell over a naked dumpling of a baby who was rolling in the dust while his father squatted near him, clucking approval. Stooping to right the infant I noticed he had a Christus medallion on a chain around his neck. "Is your little boy a Christian?" I asked the father.

He beamed upon me. "No, *Mama*, but he's dressed like one."

James interpreted this reply without the flicker of a smile.

"James, are *you* a Christian?"

He shook his head. "But I like the Bible stories, very good witchcraft."

I followed him meekly across the swamps. The religious beliefs of the Bemba were a little beyond me.

Far out on the Kasama road they were planning a new bridge over the Manshia, that swift and turbulent source of the Congo which ran through Shiwa Lake, and we drove out there for the day with Mulemfwe, the headman. Nobody knew exactly how old Mulemfwe was, but he could remember the days of the Arab traders and his tales of the Bemba were legion—if he could be induced to tell them, for

he was a reserved, proud person not given to casual friendship. When I first met him I was very aware of his penetrating glance and found myself hoping urgently that he would approve of me. A thin wiry little man with keen features, he sat bolt upright in the back of the car hugging a rifle and gabbling away to the *Bwana*, whom he adored, and watching these two men, so dissimilar in every possible way, I knew a peculiar sense of privilege. Here was a rare thing—complete trust and affection between white man and black. There was nothing sentimental about it; indeed, it was a rather gruff relationship full of arguments and commands and protests, but its roots lay deep under eighteen years of mutual labour for a land both loved.

Fortunately for me, Mulemfwe took me to his heart after sizing me up pretty thoroughly as we drove through the bush, but his method of showing his friendship was a trifle startling to say the least, since when we arrived at the Manshia he collected several workmen, cantered off up the hillside at a great pace—and proceeded to build me a lavatory. It was a most elegant edifice of woven grasses and wood and I shudder to think of the number of trees lopped for its making, but it was the most delicate compliment Mulemfwe could pay me and from the moment he proudly showed me his handiwork we got along famously.

He, like James, was immensely interested in this book and immediately asked if he might have a place in it, and if I would care to visit him at his house after working hours so that he might tell me about Shiwa, and if I would please photograph himself, his five wives, his children, his grandchildren and all his belongings. (The taking of that snapshot nearly killed me. No sooner did I get the senior members of the family grouped about the patriarch than several fresh juniors would appear from nowhere, and by the time I had somehow wedged them into focus it was discovered that a grandchild's *jinga*—a most precious treasure—was not included in the picture. In the end, after much

chivvying of scrawny hens and much tittivating of the offsprings' new shirts—bought for the occasion at the native store—I achieved the lower half of Mulemfwe, the upper halves of three Mrs. Mulemfwes, and the *jinga*.)

But to return to the Manshia. At present the river roared under a frail contraption of banded logs, but already an army of natives were making bricks for the new bridge. Children scampered to and fro with bark troughs full of clay on their heads, while their elders stood before rough trays slapping the muddy stuff into wooden moulds. They worked at lightning speed, talking continuously and spattering each other with the clay, and behind them more men turned out the made bricks into long rows which were then covered by the women with dried grasses. Already, too, thousands of sun-dried bricks were being neatly stacked into a huge kiln for firing, and several men down by the water were attempting the seemingly impossible task of diverting the Manshia from its course.

The place was in an uproar. I sat on the old bridge and wondered how on earth any order could emerge from such chaos, yet a bare month later I was to see a practically completed two-span bridge over the river.

Mulemfwe was in great form, scrambling up and down the banks, yelling instructions at the *capitaos*, flicking a long switch at the small fry who scurried past him with their loads of clay. Not that they minded; they thought the switch a grand idea and skipped, sure-footed as goats, out of its reach. The *Bwana* smiled. "Take a snap of that and show them at home how ill-treated the children are in Central Africa."

Somehow, in the middle of the clamour, we had lunch: chicken-cream and green peas, sweet potatoes with lots of butter, biscuits and cheese, three oranges apiece and coffee. Moreover, Mulemfwe had found the time to build us a lunch hut. I sat back, replete, and said, "Never again will I believe those travellers' tales of roughing it in the bush."

We giggled then over two valiant ladies who had gone on *safari* with an English-speaking native cook who provided them with three-course meals, but on their return to England had written an exciting account of how they lived for three months on fish caught with their own hands.

Afterwards Ngolonwana, one of the *capitao*s, invited me to see his hut. This was a temporary affair of woven branches and grass; in fact, the whole small settlement was temporary because when the Bemba are engaged on work any distance from their village they simply take their wives, their children, their mongrel dogs, their gourds and their blankets and trek through the bush until they reach their destination, when they erect new homes. It is all so simple; the bush provides house and firewood, the river provides water, a sack of millet, their staple food, is easily slung on the back.

I studied the interior of Ngolonwana's hut and thought how foolish it was of civilised beings to hedge themselves about with household gods. There was a wide bed of rough grass covered with blankets, a long raffia rope from which dangled the few spare garments of the family, a few wooden bowls and spoons, and a gourd or two. What more did man desire? Certainly the atmosphere was rather thick as the smoke from the fire had no outlet save through the narrow doorway, but when the chilly June night fell the family would be grateful for this stuffiness.

It was Sam, another *capitao*, who introduced me to a delicious custom. When taking measurements for the bridge he wrote these down in pencil on his bare chocolate legs and the result was an intriguing white tattoo of "25 ft. 6 ins.;" "June 30, 5,000 bricks"; and when he wished to erase anything he merely spat on his hand and then rubbed it across the writing. A novel but satisfactory method of diary-keeping, and he most obligingly kept rubbing out his decorations and doing them all over again to show me how simple the process was.

Mulemfwe was slightly agitated about the position of the

bridge. He thought it ought to be placed higher up the river "because the elephant came that way," and he knew that these rulers of the jungle held all wisdom in their massive heads. Wherever a herd crossed the water there you would find a sound river-bed which would not be disturbed when the rains began and even the smallest streams became foaming torrents which surged down from the hills. Translation of his argument roused me from a pleasant stupor induced by the hot afternoon sun. "But there aren't any elephant?"

"No? Within a mile or two of you there are probably elephant, buffalo, lion, leopard, and several kinds of buck. But they're not on show, you know. Those that are not asleep may be peering at you from the bush."

I sat up and stared first at the jungle behind me and then at the outcroppings of many-coloured dolomite rock which starred the hillside opposite to me. If only I could glimpse "the bright eyes of danger," but the African landscape preserved the sulky mood which had possessed it ever since my arrival. Seeing game from the air had been exciting, but now that I was actually living in the country of wild things I walked through the bush as peacefully as I might have walked through Richmond Park; indeed, there I should at least have seen deer. Besides, bad became worse when I returned to Shiwa each evening to hear stirring tales of creatures seen in or close to the house. There was the leopard, stealer of many ducks and chickens, which had killed a calf and thereby been led to a grisly end through the carcase of the kill being stuffed appetisingly with strychnine and spread temptingly before its murderer. There was the snake noticed on the dining-room roof, and the other snake seen on the tennis-court, and there was the black mamba.

This charming reptile was eight feet long and mother to a selection of wriggling horrors which had infested the compound and won, through their summary destruction, several sixpences for various small boys. She had festooned herself

lovingly around the thatch of the lavatory roof, and the smaller daughter of the house, after leaving this building, had announced casually, "Mummy, I *think* there's a little snake in there." A shot-gun was quickly produced, and the mamba went to join her unfortunate children—but I didn't even see her corpse, and in my mind I said fiercely that all the stories of peril at Shiwa were "tall" ones invented for my especial benefit.

So I gazed sourly at African view and discounted legendary tales of peril from fish, flesh or fowl, and listened comfortably to Mulemfwe and his underlings discussing the new bridge. One half of me said: "This is an over-rated country"; and the other half said: "You've got paradise, what more do you want?"

The other half won, because at that moment the *Bwana* suggested I should visit the hot spring.



## CHAPTER III

### THE LOTUS-EATER

#### I

A YOUTH called Temperature (most suitable name) was ordered to guide me to the hot spring. He strode easily through the bush, his slim body clad in a clay-bespattered blue shirt and a pair of very abbreviated khaki shorts, an axe swinging from his right hand, a spear balanced on his shoulder, and behind him trailed the queerest little procession. First there was a Bemba woman carrying a rolled-up bath towel on her head, then there was myself, and bringing up the rear came one of the *baka-shana* (young girls) with two cakes of soap perched on her woolly curls. There was a great deal of chatter and laughter—Temperature seemed to be the local wag, but I plodded along rather solemnly wondering if this renowned spring was really hot or if it would repeat the shock given me on my first morning at Shiwa, when I dived blithely into the swimming-pool saying “Lovely to bathe in the tropics!” and came up gasping with the cold into a glutinous, icy mass of frog spawn.

We came to a piece of open marshy ground, ploughed our way across it, presented Temperature with two cigarettes and many admonitions to call us when he thought it was five o’clock, and slithered down a boggy slope to enchantment.

The hot spring was a large pool some fifty feet long and twenty wide. The bottom was fine white sand, the water crystal-clear, and all around it were tall trees with flat parasol tops and rustling raffia palms. As I looked at it I saw little puffs of steam rising from its surface and without more ado I removed my few garments and waded in, followed by the two Bemba who bestrewed convenient rocks with soaps, towel and their bright-coloured shifts. I lay

back in the biggest hot bath I had ever known, stared up at a golden sun in a brilliant sky and felt all ecstasy creep slowly through mind and body.

Far away the Manshia murmured; above my head a grey parrot swung on a branch; all around the pool the raffias swish-swished in the soft wind, and beside me the Bemba women stretched brown graceful arms through the water and scooped handfuls of tiny rainbow-hued pebbles from the sand. They were as happy and unself-conscious as children, and they made small heaps of the pebbles on a rock because to them these stones were precious and would ultimately form necklaces or bangles. Presently, however, the elder one remembered the courtesy due to a guest, seized the soap and wriggled her way towards me. From head to feet she soaped me thoroughly, ducked me under the water and then massaged me with smooth strong fingers, smiling and nodding the while. When she had finished she sat back on her heels, frowned as though dissatisfied, and suddenly made a pounce at my head. My hair, she explained in pantomime, needed washing too, so she proceeded to give me a shampoo. I submitted meekly; indeed, I enjoyed the whole performance, for her ministrations were most soothing, and by the time she was pleased with my state of cleanliness I was almost asleep.

But not yet was I allowed to rest. Armed with the second cake of soap the *baka-shana* set to work on me. Once again I was scrubbed, massaged, shampooed and rinsed; once again my eyes, ears, and nostrils were scrutinised as they had not been since early childhood while the elder woman looked on, pointing agitatedly when she thought her companion had not given sufficient attention to any portion of my anatomy.

At last there was peace—but only when I flopped over on to my tummy and flatly refused to be washed any more. Then the two started to scrub each other until I could bear sight of such energy no longer and offered them each some chocolate.

So we lay in that warm pool, gnawing bars of chocolate from far away Bournville, grinning occasionally at each other in perfect friendliness. The only English they knew was "five o'clock"; my Chibemba was limited to "*Mapoleni!*" "*Mutendi!*" "*Manshia!*" and "*È Mukwai!*" yet there was no feeling of constraint between us and I thought drowsily how much saner than white women these Bemba were. They were concerned only with the elements of living; they did not clutter up their days with unimportant detail; they held out both hands to joy and laughter, and accepted sorrow and hardship with stoicism. They had never listened in to a radio, never used a telephone, never seen a train, and their only acquaintance with the machine age was through sight of the Ford car, an occasional lorry and the aeroplanes that zoomed above on their way between Mbeya and Mpika, and these things they regarded not as mechanical products but as part of the strange and rather pleasant magic of the white man.

But soon I gave up thinking about the Bemba or about anything at all. A sense of sheer physical comfort held me in thrall. Somewhere there was another world where people worked, and quarrelled, and worried over themselves, and the state of Europe, and the Sino-Japanese war, and money; but so long as I lay in this warm, caressing water I was immune from that world and no tentacle-like arm stretched out from it could touch me.

A yell from Temperature roused me and I saw to my dismay that the sun had dipped behind the parasol tree-tops. "Five o'clock!"

My elder friend shook her head violently and the *baka-shana* snuggled down under the water and after another two or three shouts Temperature abandoned all attempt to rouse us. Five o'clock or six, what did time matter?

The sun had disappeared altogether before we left the pool, and then the Bemba had to dry me carefully, dress me, rub my hair with the towel until I resembled a species of

gollywog. We found Temperature fast asleep on a tussock of grass, his head pillow'd on his arm, a seraphic smile curving his mouth. As I trailed indolently behind the party I felt vaguely sorry for him because he had not shared the magic of the pool, but I was really filled with a supremely selfish feeling of well-being.

Half-way to the bridge we met the *Bwana*. "D'you know the time?"

"Time, what is it?" But even as I put the question the spell was broken and the everyday world came back with horrid suddenness. While I had been lying in the pool he, who had been working all day in a flurry of clay, dust, and scampering black figures, had had to wait for me, and would now have to drive home in the dark. Even Mulemfwe looked a shade reproachful.

"I'm sorry. I've been lotus-eating."

He nodded understandingly. "I know. Next time you can spend all day there."

Mulemfwe grunted. He had small patience with lotus-eaters; but I walked on blithely down the rutted, sandy road to the car. *All day* in that heavenly spot!

## II

Thereafter the enchanted pool was my mecca, and my wily suggestions to steer picnics in its direction were machiavellian. I developed a technique, one calculated to draw the last drop of beauty from a day there. On a shelf of rock I laid my lunch, my tea, my cigarettes and matches—and if there is any better sensation on earth than that of lying back in warm water which laps the chin while you eat a leg of chicken in your fingers, then I have yet to meet it. When lethargy threatened to overcome me entirely I forced myself to flounder across the emerald green bog where the hot, bubbling mud hissed underfoot, and plunged into the cold swirl of the Manshia, letting the current carry me

down-stream before I turned to swim against it. Tingling and exhilarated I then squelched back to the delight of the hot spring.

Always the grey parrots gazed solemnly from the branches, and the raffias whispered in the wind, and green leaves against blue sky made an intricate and lovely pattern you never tired of watching, and birds of every colour skimmed above the shining water. Enchantment grew. I wanted to stay in this place for ever, dreaming the days away, forgetting past and future, knowing absolute peace. They laughed at me and offered to build me a hut on stilts so that I might sleep beside my beloved pool, but even in my languorous state of contentment I knew that would be wrong. The desire to lotus-eat was creeping through my very bones and if I gave way to it I should never be able to resist it again. Besides—dreadful thought—ecstasy would pall. Before long I should be held to that pool, unable to leave it, yet with my wretched mind niggling to know what was happening to the world I had discarded. No, the pool had to be kept as a place apart, a heaven to be gained but seldom. All too well I saw the pitfalls which lurked, like the mud beneath the smooth green bog, in the path of the lotus-eater. When next I visited the pool, I told myself sternly, I must spend more time in the river and less in the warm water.

Alas, I had grown so lazy that all sorts of excuses prevented me from carrying out this grand intention. There were crocodiles and snakes in the Manshia (there were, but not where the river ran so swiftly), the spiky grasses by the bog cut my legs, it was stupid to take so much exercise at such an altitude. Oh, yes, I too had descended to taking refuge behind the altitude. So I continued to feed myself with chicken and tangerines from my shelf of rock, and to wonder why people called this part of the earth "darkest Africa," and to dream of nothing in particular until, when I arrived home one evening still wrapped about with magic, someone said, "I've wired to Mufulira copper mine asking

if they can have you next week. And then you can go on to Lusaka to see Government at close quarters and, of course, you *must* see the Victoria Falls."

I felt suddenly very cold. Copper mines? Governments? Imagine exchanging the enchanted pool for such appalling inventions! It couldn't be done and I said so plainly.

"But think of your book! You can't possibly form any opinion about the Bemba just from seeing them here in their natural state. You've got to go south and find out how they react to civilisation."

I didn't want to think of the book. I wanted to go on lotus-eating, but everyone was adamant and at this point I discovered with a jolt that my days in the hot spring had sapped all powers of argument from me. Weakly I agreed to the copper mines but positively implored to be spared Lusaka. Nobody paid much attention; maybe they thought the altitude had turned my brain. I went to my room and leaned far out of the window staring at the lake, a sheet of silver under the rising moon, and out of the dusk stepped the *Mama*, a small, alert figure in blue jeans and wide-brimmed hat. "Don't worry," she said comfortingly. "Perhaps Mufulira won't answer the wire; anyway, it'll probably take ages to get to them, and you'll come back here afterwards."

I remained disconsolate, but the children poked their heads through the window beside me. "Can we have a dance, Mummy? Do let's, because *Mama* Bigland's never seen a proper dance!"

Two boys rolled drums under the flame-tree and began to beat them softly so that the rhythmic thudding rose eerily in the windless air, and dark figures padded from all directions in answer to the summons. A crowd gathered on the lawn beside the canna lilies; the house-boys in their white aprons, young women with babies on their backs, old women with flat, wrinkled breasts, fat brown piccanins mother-naked, groups of men and boys. The drumming grew to a crescendo of sound and the Bemba swung into two lines,

men on one side, women on the other, singing a wordless chant and clapping their hands. They started with the "courting dance" wherein the women skip forward with much swaying of the hips towards the man of their choice and he, after laughing protest and teasing from his companions, at length condescends to perform a variation of Sir Roger de Coverley with the lady. My friend Aggeness, I noticed, was the star turn of this dance. With uncanny grace she whirled her slim body to the beat of the drums, flirting her eyelashes at George, the cook, casting him aside in favour of one of the other men after a brief space, retreating to her place with a coyness quite indescribable. Very definitely, Aggeness had technique.

But the most astonishing to watch, as the dance grew more and more furious, was the behaviour of the babies, who actually slept peacefully while their mothers jigged and dipped and swayed. How they did not fall out of the shawls which bound them so carelessly to the maternal back I could not fathom, but nobody else seemed in the least worried by possible accidents to these brown scraps. Mrs. James, one of the most tireless dancers, had apparently forgotten she possessed a child at all, because it ended up face-downwards, still in its shawl and still asleep.

So the Bemba danced on under the full yellow moon, children without a care in the world; and the rhythm of the drums changed to a fast, imperative thrumming and out of the line of men leapt Maké, the man in charge of the cattle kraals. His name meant strength, because the story ran that when only seven years old he had plunged a spear into the throat of a lion which was mauling his father. A weird figure he looked as he bounded across the grass chanting, grimacing, rolling his eyes, while the others applauded him loudly. His was a war-dance, very evidently, and one beloved by this tribe of warriors.

Leaning by the window I wondered if anywhere else in Central Africa I could have watched such a scene, for this

was no post-beer orgy in a village remote from the white man's gaze, but a dance literally on the white man's doorstep, and among the fifty or more natives the two little daughters of the house pranced happily. To them, thank goodness, there was no difference between their white friends and these black folk they had known since babyhood, but I derived a certain grim amusement from imagining the disapproval of most white people could they have witnessed such a sight. They would have talked at length of the unspeakable indecency of native dancing, of the Black Peril, of the gross immorality of savage tribes. And they would have been wrong. Crude these dances might be, but there was less indecency about them than you would see in any European ballroom and as for immorality, well, the rigid tribal laws of the Bemba did not hesitate to punish those who offended against them. Passionately I hoped that the two children who skipped so light-heartedly through the dance would never learn the mistrusts, the antagonisms, the hatreds that lie between the white man and the African.

Gradually the throbbing of the drums died away, the chanting and the clapping ceased. Black shadows slipped down the jacaranda avenue, dodged under the cypress trees, shuffled past the house on their way to the compound, but the echoes of their voices still hung over the moonlit lawn by the canna lilies and the memory of their dancing stayed in my mind. Depression returned. How could I leave the Bemba, even for a little space? How could I turn from black man's Africa to white man's Africa?

There was a knock at my door and James entered with a can of hot water. "No time for bath to-night, *Mama*. But you liked our dancing, eh?"

"Yes." On an impulse I faced him. "Tell me, James, do you ever think of what is going to happen to Africa?"

A puzzled look came into his brown eyes. "I do not understand, *Mama*."

James, no less than I, was a lotus-eater.

## CHAPTER IV

### SERPENTS IN EDEN

#### I

THE days drifted by and I hugged myself because no reply had yet come from Mufulira. For long hours I lay on my stomach beside the *malé* (dwarf millet) field where the women were picking the grain. Here were no reapers, no scythes; merely a host of willing fingers to strip the brown grain from its stems. All round me bands of toddlers stood, thumbs thrust into their mouths as they scanned me thoroughly. I was a funny one, they thought. I kept falling off my *jinga*—a most entertaining habit; I couldn't speak their language, I had blisters on my arms. My one asset, in their eyes, was the mirror I carried in my pocket, and they shrieked delightedly when they were allowed to borrow this and study their faces in it. Pleasant little creatures they were, but the appalling umbilical hernias from which they suffered distressed me until I learnt that this disease was regarded as a great sign of beauty and had seldom been known to lead to any ill effects. In England such children would have been hustled, post-haste, to an operating table—but this was Africa and in some mysterious manner hernias either vanished as the infant grew to adolescence or remained to bring their owner not pain but kudos.

After the picking of the *malé* came the weighing and treading of the grain. Perspiring *capitaos* manipulated a huge pair of scales and screamed anathema at various ladies who insisted that wrong weight for their kerosene tin-ful had been given. Until I visited Shiwa I had no idea of the uses to which a kerosene tin may be put. It may hold butter, grain, salt, fruit, honey or your clothes when you go on *safari*—the only thing it never holds is kerosene.

From the weighing-machine boys carried great bowls of the grain to a circular piece of ground which had been beaten hard and flat. Here hundreds of feet shuffled ceaselessly until the small round seeds of the millet were all separated from the chaff, and here too swarms of small children abounded, all bent upon watching their elders at work.

From a morning in this place I would progress slowly up the hill to the fields where the *Mama* was experimenting with different methods of crop production, a labour of Sisyphus with which she struggled in most admirable and tenacious fashion, for she was up against every difficulty imaginable. The soil of the plateau was thin, miserable stuff and despite careful study and the application of all kinds of chemical manures had so far failed to improve under treatment, so that the original native method of fertilisation had to be used. This was known as the "firing of the ground," and in the winter months of June and July the Bemba pollarded all the nearby trees and heaped the branches on the field, leaving them there to dry under the hot sun. In October they set fire to them and the ash, rich in necessary chemicals, was driven into the soil by the rains which came in November. Now the ground was ready for spring sowing, and the inevitable *malé* was planted, to be followed the next year by white millet, and the third probably by ground-nuts or beans. By that time the soil was again so poor that the field simply had to be given back to the bush for a number of years.

To the Bemba this mattered not at all. Were there not vast tracts of virgin country ready to their hand? All that needed to be done was to choose a place, clear it by firing, and wait a few months until springtime. Of course, this meant abandoning villages right and left and trekking perhaps fifty or a hundred miles through the bush to a suitable spot, but to a nomad tribe such uprootings came easily. They entirely failed to see the extravagance of their methods,

or the fact that even the plateau of north-eastern Rhodesia did not stretch to infinity.

To the student of agriculture who was striving to wrest a healthy succession of crops from the land, the haphazard ways of the Bemba mattered a very great deal. To begin with, how could an estate of over 30,000 acres pay if mile-square fields were left waste and arid until the jungle encroached on them once more? To end with, how could a self-supporting community grow when scores of its members calmly departed each season, bundles on heads, in search of fresh ground?

With these two basic problems the *Mama* was battling, and perhaps the greater of the two was the attitude of the Bemba towards agricultural experiment. There was, for instance, their complete inability to see why any orderly rotation of crops should be attempted, and their dislike of the use of animal manure. This latter had taken a long time to overcome, and even now the older ones regarded the huge heaps of compost by the cattle kraals with distrust. Before the white man had brought the cattle to the valley and had instituted a system of dipping which prevented the ravages of tsetse fly and ticks, the natives had been content with a few mangy goats, and the idea of enriching the soil with cattle-droppings definitely offended them.

Fortunately, the *Mama* had studied human—particularly Bemba—nature quite a long time before she studied agriculture, and with infinite patience she was progressing slowly towards her goal. On the hillside were fields of beans of many different kinds, of peas, of sweet potatoes, while down in the valley the limes and oranges thrived exceedingly. Even so there was heartbreak in plenty. Marauding leopards could destroy months of work in a night, locusts could make a visitation, blights and pests of all sorts could descend on the crops without warning, the Bemba would suddenly have "off days" when they simply scratched their heads and stared helplessly at the growing

beans, or pumpkins, or sweet potatoes. "After all," they seemed to say, "this is a terrific fuss about nothing. If we have *malé* we have enough to eat, so why worry?"

That, as the *Mama* explained, was the gist of it. The wants of the tribe were so few and they had existed so long on the border-line of starvation that they could not visualise a life in which peace and plenty went hand in hand. Moreover, they were a lazy people. The *Bwana* killed an ox each Friday. That was good, because they could then buy beef (which they called a "relish to their food") for a few pence a pound. But if the *Bwana* had not had an ox to kill they would not have bestirred themselves to go hunting unless for the excitement of the chase, although they dearly loved the taste of meat.

As I swerved wildly down the sandy path on my *jinga* I couldn't help remembering all the exciting advertisements seen from time to time in papers at home which exhorted settlers to come to sunny Rhodesia, or glorious Kenya, or beautiful Tanganyika. They came, heaven help them, sublimely convinced that they would retire with the wealth of Ind in twenty years' time. The altitude, the natives, the failure of their crops and the silence usually got them down inside twenty months—the advertisements had forgotten to mention Africa, that deep-bosomed but Spartan mother.

At the bottom of the hill I met a group of men earnestly conversing with the *Bwana*. A leopard was stealing the fowls out on the Kasakalabwe road and they wished to borrow a gun so that they might hunt him that night.

"But if you go blazing away in the dark you'll probably kill somebody."

"*Bwana*, there are no people stir out of doors after dusk."

"Mm. What about those who wish to commit adultery?"

This remark was treated as a huge joke. (Adultery is a crime among the Bemba and for some obscure reason the punishment for it is much more severe when it is proved to have been committed in the open air.)

"But, *Bwana*, such wicked folk do not stray to Kasakalabwe; they prefer to stay by your cypresses."

I rode on hastily. The apt replies of the Bemba always reduced me to hopeless giggles.

Outside the three native stores three men sat on upturned soap-boxes working sewing-machines for dear life, while on the ground beside them squatted their customers who argued shrilly as to the merits of each tailor as they waited for their finished garments. On my appearance, however, they desisted and made a concerted rush at the *jinga* because they knew by now that I never dismounted from the beastly thing but simply steered into the nearest Bemba and collapsed. When the lucky recipient of this attention had disentangled himself from my arms and legs he was entitled to ride the *jinga* while I visited Mr. Shem. For eighteen years Mr. Shem had kept a store in Shiwa and he was wont to swell visibly while he showed you the receipts for the past month and pointed the finger of scorn at his two upstart neighbours who had only been in the place a year or two. His shop was long, low, and crowded. Suspended from ropes were gaudy silk handkerchiefs, frightful striped shirts, several pairs of suspiciously second-hand trousers, a *jinga* (horribly rusted), and two mackintoshes which always interested me since they appeared to be twins yet one was priced at a pound and the other at two pounds, ten shillings. On the rough board which formed the counter were boxes of cheap soaps, piles of sand shoes, bolts of blue denim and gay-coloured prints, pots and pans, and reels of cotton. Underneath the counter—well, you could gaze at the medley of goods for half an hour and still be confused, while if you were wise you kept your eyes averted from the shelves at the back of the shop lest you became agitated at the amazing clutter they contained.

Mr. Shem and I were great friends—he practised his salesmanship on me with great success: I, not so successfully, practised my Chibemba on him. His ambition was to make

me buy English cigarettes at half a crown for fifty, while my aim was to purchase the same number of "Cape to Cairo" brand (known affectionately throughout Africa as "Coughs to Coffins") for one and threepence. Our argument was always polite and lengthy—and Shem won every time until he ran out of stock, when he immediately tried to persuade me to make up the one and threepence difference by buying some virulent pink soap.

He was an inveterate gossip, and from him I learnt of local happenings. Most of his stories, confided in a wispy whisper are, alas, unfit for this book, not because Shem was in any way a vulgar-minded person but simply because he knew not the meaning of reticence as we know it. Beside him, as we chatted, little Shems kept popping up and he would tell me proudly how old they were—he was the only Bemba I met who knew the exact age of his children.

On this particular evening we almost came to blows, as he urged me to journey south and I, confronted once more with the spectre of Mufulira, said firmly I preferred to stay at Shiwa.

"That is a grave pity. To come all the way from England in a *ndecki* (aeroplane) and reside in Shiwa is absurd. In the south there are great cities, fine shops, theatres, cinemas—I have it, you must go to Johannesburg!"

Somehow I extricated myself from further discussion as to my future and put a ten-shilling note on the counter. "There is the bill to pay."

Shem scrabbled among a litter of old papers and unearthed a greasy *ticketi*. "Here we are!" he announced triumphantly, and proceeded to read out a list of the goods I had had during the past week. I don't know why, but this weekly reckoning of Shem's always shamed me. The paltry eight and sixpence I had spent this time seemed wholly inadequate for all that I had bought from him. He then opened a large tin and poured from it a strange variety of coins: East African, Rhodesian, West Coast, English . . . there were few currencies in which Shem did not deal

and the only money I simply could not plant on him was a cumbersome Egyptian ten *piastres* piece. I picked up a handful of change which included a French franc and a Portuguese penny.

“See you to-morrow,” beamed Shem. “We shall have more talk about Johannesburg.”

I mounted the *jinga* registering a vow to send James to do my shopping the next day.

Further along the road Shelassie White hailed me. What Shelassie did for six days out of seven I never found out, but on Fridays he acted as slaughterman and butcher and he was now selling the last of his meat to a group of men. Mulemfwe, clasping an ox’s head under one arm, saluted me briskly, Sam dangled a revolting piece of liver under my nose, Akimu, the donkey-boy, tenderly wrapped a shin bone in his plaited straw hat.

Shelassie leaned negligently on a colossal carving-knife. “*Mama*, have you yet written to the *Bwana* Major and asked him to send me the photograph he took of me last year?”

Poor Shelassie! Each time he saw me he repeated this question, and each time he seemed disappointed that I had been unable to get a reply from the *Bwana* Major—who happened at the moment to be somewhere in Czechoslovakia. I mumbled something, and he launched into an account of “when I was on a newspaper in Capetown, *Mama*,” which went on for quite ten minutes. Listening to Shelassie you formed the opinion that he had been proprietor of the *Cape Argus*, but ultimately you discovered that he had been a newsboy at a street corner. He was a little hurt, I think, that he had not been ordered to escort me instead of James, because when the *Bwana* Major stayed at Shiwa “I took him, *Mama*, to villages where no white man *ever* goes.” However, I consoled him by promising to take another photograph of him and pedalled on up the hill to the house.

Outside the front door stood a decrepit car which I eyed

dubiously. Visitors! Propping the *jinga* against the wall I tiptoed along to the little door beside my room and ran straight into the housekeeper. "There's a White Father and a Brown Brother in the hall and James has gone *gaga* and brought jam-jars instead of glasses, and for goodness' sake come and *do* something!"

I was rather thrilled. Two Catholic missionaries sipping from Tiptree glasses sounded interesting. James barred my progress to the hall. "Your legs, *Mama*."

Why should I have felt two years old and slapped at that as I gazed down at near-white veldtschoen and scarred and dusty ankles? After all, James had committed a far more heinous crime than mine, but somehow I couldn't remind him of it. "All right," I said crossly, and submitted to a thorough scrub of my deplorable lower extremities before donning the *Bwana*'s bedroom slippers.

In the hall, enthroned in a large arm-chair, was the White Father, his rosary dark against his rough, yellowish robe, his bald head with its absurd fringe of grey hair gleaming under the lamplight. Somewhere in the background lurked the Brown Brother, but he merged into the panelling so well and his superior talked so much that I wasn't really conscious of him.

"So, you are a visitor to this continent? Myself, I have been here for twenty years, and next month I am to be consecrated as a Bishop. Now, tell me your impressions of the native? For myself, I know him so well—ah, as nobody else knows him! Why does he behave as a cunning child? Why does he eternally change his faith? Why does he behave always as though he mistrusted us?"

His guttural accent betrayed his German origin, the burden of his song seemed to be "*warum?*", almost I said "Heil Hitler!" and restrained myself just in time.

"I do not think, Father, that the native is as black as he appears. I find him a pleasant creature—so long as he is left to work out his own salvation."

That, of course, was the worst thing I could have said. Upon my head opened a torrent of speech. Was I wholly unaware of the noble work done by the White Fathers during their forty years' sojourn in Central Africa? Did I not realise the appalling cruelties practised by the heathen? Was it impossible for me to understand the fearful activities of other churches who snatched Catholic converts with both violence and malice from the arms of Rome? Did I not see the magnificence of this approaching consecration in the fine new church which lay south of Mpika?

"Of course," went on the White Father, "it is hard to obtain all necessary symbols in this remote place, but I can assure you it will be an unforgettable ceremony."

I felt a little dashed. What could ceremonies matter beside the inescapable fact that the Bemba, heathen though they might be, were a fine people worthy of better things than petty quarrels between white men?

The guttural voice rolled on. "Such a wasteful race. Look at the good oil from the ground-nuts with which they smear their bodies! Now that oil is invaluable as cooking-oil, *invaluable!*"

No doubt it was; but I changed the subject. "Tell me, Father, when your mission boys are naughty, do you beat them?"

His eye swivelled in the direction of the Brown Brother, who was engrossed in conversation with the housekeeper. "If they are young I do, but very lightly, oh, very lightly."

That was something. I tried again. "And on your many journeys through the bush do you carry a gun?"

His hands went up in horror. A man of God never went armed! "Just the boy walking in front with a spear," he said comfortably, and went back to more eulogies of the approaching consecration.

My third shot definitely showed me to be a bad sportsman. "When you have leave do you go to Germany?"

The minute I had spoken I regretted my words. Opposite

me the portly figure of the White Father shrank to that of a withered old man whose fingers beat a ceaseless tattoo on the arms of the chair, "Germany, my Germany!" and in the shadows behind him the Brown Brother stirred uneasily.

I thought of the years these men had spent labouring for their church in Africa, of the disappointments they must have known and the divided allegiance they must hold towards the Vatican and their Fatherland with its strange new rulings, and I felt suddenly humble as vision of what their life must be came to me. They were priests, yet they had relatives and friends whom they dearly loved, memories of a country now barred to them. Not so easily would this Bishop-designate receive a holy ring from Rome, for even there the shadow of Il Duce stretched from the Palazzo Venezia to that walled sanctuary which had housed the core of Catholicism for centuries.

The pity of it all was that through a long period of isolation they had forgotten true faith and grown absorbed in the myriad small troubles which beset them. I did not blame them; in their place I should have lost the will to live, but as I looked at them I realised fully and for the first time the difficulties of missionaries.

They rose to go, and I wandered back to my room where James was tidying up. "Do you like missionaries, James?"

"Why should I?" he said simply; then his voice became eager. "Mama, there is a jumble-sale to-morrow, wonderful clothes for a penny or a *tikki*! You will come to see it?"

"Yes." I sat down rather wearily on the edge of my bed. The way in which white people and their problems kept popping up in darkest Africa was depressing.

## II

There were serpents in Eden, and the two most obvious ones were Cleo, the crested crane, and Leonard Billy. Cleo was the most abominable bird ever hatched. She slept—or

squawked—in a crate in the courtyard and she spent her days eluding the small boy whose job it was to confine her to the tennis-court and lawn. He was a sleepy child, and Cleo took full advantage of the cat-naps he snatched while huddled on the wall. If he closed an eye she flapped a wing, if he closed both she gathered her hideous long legs beneath her and steered an erratic aerial course for the *paw-paw* trees. Unfortunately, my hatred of her was reciprocated, and no sooner did I sidle forth in search of tangerines than Cleo followed me, uttering raucous screeches and pecking at my bare legs. The more my ire grew the more ardent were her attentions, and it became one of the sights of Shiwa to watch the furiously hopping *Mama* in the *Bwana*'s bedroom slippers evading Cleo's beak.

My one quarrel with the housekeeper, otherwise my dear friend, was her passion for Cleo. With her the wretched bird seemed almost human. Perched on one leg she would follow her round the gardens, down to the dairy, through the orange groves, a positive beam in her wicked little eyes. "Dear Cleo! Nice Cleo!"

I snapped, "She's a miserable bird, and you know it," and Cleo made straightway for my heels.

This dislike of a poor crested crane may sound absurd, but dodging Cleo round a tangerine tree was no light task, and on an evening when I was informed that a large green snake had been seen on the doorstep but that I could not view it since Cleo had eaten it, I demanded loudly that the bird should be given a big dose of castor-oil. The governess, an adventurous soul, was all for this drastic purge, but just as we were hunting up the bottle the housekeeper appeared and foiled our little plan. Thereafter, there was no escape from Cleo; indeed, the marvel is that I ever made notes for this book at all, because in the early morning hours (six till nine) I could not concentrate unless I devoured at least seven tangerines and the effort of picking these, pursued by Cleo, was exhausting to a degree.

In time I learnt to avoid Cleo: not so easily, alas, did I avoid Leonard Billy, the abnormally tall and thin youth who ran the dispensary. His ambition was to be a doctor and a Baden-Powell rolled into one, and his pertinacity was astonishing. I first met him when I was photographing the Mulemfwe family and he appeared from nowhere to beg me to view his dispensary. I expressed admiration of the large airy room, but Leonard Billy disapproved of my cursory survey and I had to stand mute while he thrust innumerable bottles under my nose. "Smell! Good! Poison!"

Decidedly they were poison. Anything less virulent than carbolic acid failed to interest Leonard Billy. "I study here because the dispenser has gone to Kasama to work in the hospital. I love the medicines and the illnesses. I am good Boy Scout, very good. You have son Boy Scout? I send him my photograph and a wooden spoon; he write me all about Boy Scouts in England. I have belt, see? Tie, whistle, all complete. I show you more poison, look!"

A little of Leonard Billy went a very long way. "Itch paint!" He seized a tin of sickly yellowish ointment, dug into it with his fingers and smeared my arm with it. "Wonderful paint—like magic. All the sores disappear when it is applied."

Subdued by the awful smells I had sniffed from his bottles I said faintly that I did not suffer from itch and turned to go. In my innocence I imagined Leonard Billy would remain in his beloved dispensary, but not a bit of it. "This is my house. See my little brothers and sisters, lovely children!"

Five or six scrofulous small beings stared up at me. I felt that Leonard Billy might, with advantage, have coated them with itch-paint, but said hurriedly that they were nice creatures. "And my father, here he comes. Ah, you must meet my father."

He was a horrid, bearded individual in extremely ragged shorts and a curious belted jacket of blue linen. Simian he

looked, and the ends of belt which flapped behind him heightened the resemblance to one of the *bandar-log*. His manner was even more unctuous than that of his son, and his sudden interest in his younger offspring was clearly inspired by my presence.

“Come along,” said James severely. “You must not waste time on such silly people.” Turning upon Leonard Billy and his family he let forth a flood of uncomplimentary Chibemba.

I was perverse. After all, it wouldn’t do my elder son any harm to correspond with a Boy Scout in Africa. “If you come up to the house to-morrow I will take your photograph and tell you about Scouts in England.”

It was a promise I lived to regret. From that moment Leonard Billy haunted the terrace outside my room from dawn until dusk—even in my sleep I dreamed of that angular figure with its spindle-legs. In despair I photographed him, exhorting him beforehand to put his Scout belt right side up. But Leonard Billy’s English stumbled at this request and finally I had to ask James’s assistance. “Hold his shorts up while I change the belt.”

He smelt of castor-oil, poisons, and worse. Somehow I set the belt right way up and stepped back to fetch the Kodak. When I turned Leonard Billy was wearing his shirt over belt and trousers. It was too much. Alas! the best snapshot I ever took of a native was of that miserable boy.

“Now you run away,” said James firmly.

Leonard Billy grinned, and continued to haunt the terrace. On my morning peregrinations after tangerines I would meet him squirting liquid from a medical spray at the orange trees.

“What is in that spray?”

“Tannic acid, *Mama*, very good for burns. I have paid five visits already to-day, the people like me very much.”

“And how many burns did you treat?”

“There weren’t any, *Mama*; nothing but itch.”

I couldn't cope with Leonard Billy—nor could the orange trees.

There were other serpents, less obvious yet more harmful, and one of them, alas, was a white one. I discovered its existence when I went far up the valley to Timbe, where a new school was to be built. The Bemba were very thrilled about this and the workmen cleared a hill-top of trees and undergrowth at incredible speed because here their children were going to learn to read, write, and do arithmetic, accomplishments by which the illiterate parents set great store. Skipping about between tree trunks, axes, sheets of tin for the ant-proof course, and innumerable measuring lines was Nelson, the local schoolmaster. "Look, *Mama*, we shall have three big class-rooms, one for the babies, one for sub-standard A, one for standard A. Is not that wonderful? And we shall have three native teachers, one from the White Fathers, one from the Scottish Church and one from the Government. We shall put the Government boy in the middle so that the others cannot quarrel so much."

He shouted with laughter at this joke, but my answering grin was a shade sickly. "But why should there be any quarrelling?"

"Oh, always they quarrel. They want each other's converts. So stupid."

It was more than stupid; it was tragic. Just how tragic I learnt by slow degrees as I wandered round outlying villages. Here were seven small Bemba received into the Holy Catholic Church, baptised with saint-names, decorated with Christus medallions. In a month's time these seven would be members of the Scottish Mission or of the Church of England Missionary Society because, as their parents would tell you, "they will surely die and be eaten by flames if they stay with the White Fathers, the other missionaries tell us so." Nor did the matter end there, for the system of snatching converts proceeded apace. I myself have heard a Scotsman complaining in all seriousness that his converts

had been stolen from him by the Catholics by means of gifts of fish-hooks and slates, while a White Father informed me that an English Churchman had presented the children with safety-pins, thus luring them into his fold, and the Bemba themselves vastly enjoyed these schemes of bribery and corruption since thereby they won and hoarded many treasures for personal adornment. Christus medallions were popular as jewellery, but even better were a row of safety-pins slung round the neck on copper wire; slates were greatly sought after as on them you could draw crude pictures, and fish-hooks gladdened the hearts of those who had formerly had to catch their fish by poisoning the water in which they swam. So long as the rival Churches were content to lavish these presents the Bemba were happy. Parrot-like, they learnt to gabble little prayers and Bible stories but true Christianity, except in extremely rare cases, did not enter into the matter at all. Why should it, when the very men who told them stories of the Christ indulged in such petty bargaining?

In an effort to understand this state of affairs I talked to many missionaries of different denominations. To the bulk of these the greatest problem in Africa was the schism between the Churches, and one man who had been in the continent for forty odd years declaimed passionately to me all afternoon about the horrific methods employed by others until I, not a religious woman, felt thoroughly shocked not only by his views but by his very evident scorn of the Bemba. They were little better than cattle, in his opinion. They were cruel and rapacious, and their morals were deplorable. They were totally unreliable, ridden with witchcraft, out-and-out liars, thieves, and murderers. Not that they really counted—*what mattered was the schism between the Churches*.

I remembered David Livingstone and wondered, yet little by little I began to understand why this constant and tragic friction went on. Young men, full of evangelical fervour

but temperamentally quite unsuited to Tropical Africa, came out from England determined to snatch the natives from strange gods. Firmly implanted in their minds was the idea that all "heathen" religions were wrong and they ignored the fact that they were up against age-old beliefs and customs which would probably—and naturally—take centuries to break down. Within a very short while they were disillusioned—and Africa completed their despair. In most cases they had to live under exceedingly rough conditions, look after a huge and scattered district which involved endless journeys through the bush, face time and time again the bland evasions of the Bemba. And behind all these trials were two basic factors which destroyed their peace. The sun, which I loved so much, became to them a pitiless scourge which followed them the year long; and the altitude sent their minds askew.

I had laughed about the altitude: I laughed no more when I saw the effect it had on white men. After a year or so this clear, heady air did desperate things to some who lived on the plateau. They developed moods of sulkiness which alternated with nervous spells during which they snapped viciously at every person or thing within reach. Tiny troubles assumed enormous proportions, pin-pricks became knife-thrusts, intolerance grew to savage enmity. That is not exaggeration. I have seen men (and not only missionaries) flame into sudden rage over the merest trifle. I have talked to men whose minds were so distorted that they simply could not see straight on anything. I have met men sodden with whisky, malaria and tick fever, or syphilis, who have sunk far lower than the animals that range the jungle.

But even with knowledge of what Africa could do to white men the behaviour of the average missionary distressed me beyond measure. Always my mind harked back to Livingstone, who had endured so many hardships and yet remained immune, his faith serene and untouched by

petty spites. And I met two men, one a White Father and the other a Scottish Church missionary, who possessed that greatest of all human virtues, true humility of spirit. Their sympathy with the Bemba amazed me, and watching their work I knew an urgent longing that all the ministers sent out to Central Africa should be as they were, strong in mind and body, holding within themselves a clear-burning torch that illumined the darkest corners of the native mentality. To such men "schism" was unknown; so was arrogance. Far from believing that the Bemba were a hopeless race they realised fully the worth of many tribal laws and customs and strove to amalgamate these with real Christianity.

Meantime, however, their brethren pursued their endless bickerings against each other and their continual whine about the heathen. This latter defeated me entirely and many were the arguments I had with missionaries concerning it. One particular day when James had guided me to a remote village I met a missionary and rashly plunged into fierce controversy.

"This disgusting Lesa they worship; what can you do with such a people?"

I said: "But Lesa seems to me a good spirit; indeed, there is an extraordinary resemblance between Lesa's legends and that of the Garden of Eden. Not only the Bemba but other Bantu tribes have told me stories."

"I can't understand how you dare to compare Lesa with God."

"Why not? Because the natives call the spirit of the air Lesa and invent various tales of this being's prowess is not to say that he is a bad god."

"You are talking nonsense," he replied stiffly. "And you must remember that we are striving always to make the native use the name Lesa for our Christian God."

I blinked. "You mean that you agree with me that Lesa is God to the Bemba?"

He was most indignant. "Certainly not!"

“But he is. Take the legend of the first man and woman, who were bodily perfect except that they had no sex organs, a fact pointed out to them by the honey-bird who induced them to send him with a message to Lesa demanding that he make them whole. So Lesa gave him two packets of medicine, one for the first man and one for the first woman, but the honey-bird was so inquisitive that on the way back to earth he pecked at one of the packets with his beak to see what was in it and scattered the contents on the ground. He didn’t say anything, but gave the man the unopened packet, which he swallowed. Next morning he awakened to find himself queerly changed, but his partner remained as Lesa had fashioned her and was very angry indeed. So acute did their differences become that the honey-bird (knowing its secret crime) grew frightened and urged them both to ask Lesa for more medicine. This was eventually given to them, but Lesa was so furious that he ordained that evil spirits (*fiwa*) should enter into man and woman as punishment for their foolishness in listening to the honey-bird, while the latter was condemned to remain the busy-body of the forest which he is to this day. And there you are,” I finished. “In a crude way that is the story of the Garden of Eden.”

“It is nothing of the kind! It is a glaring instance of how these people twist everything round to sex. You don’t know them, you’ve got no conception of the ghastly things hidden behind their smiling faces. Sex rules them—and witchcraft dominates that sex. I’ve seen a woman who had offended against their revolting rituals die from sheer terror.”

On the way home I said to James, “Do you believe in witchcraft?”

“Yes, *Mama*. Often I have to throw away my dinner because my last wife—the bad one who made my child die—has cast spells upon the food.”

“But she lives two hundred miles away. Surely you don’t believe she can affect you at all?”

"Yes, *Mama*." His voice was obstinate and his usually expressive face quite blank. Very definitely he was not going to discuss the matter.

And in the days which followed I realised that the only questions the Bemba would not answer were those connected with witchcraft. Here were James and Mulemfwe, the former a travelled man who had even journeyed up from Lusaka in an aeroplane, the latter an amazingly intelligent person with a wide knowledge of his people. These two were eager to tell me all about the Bemba and the country; but let me mention the word witchcraft and they shut up like clams. Even to the *Bwana* did they preserve silence on this subject, and the little he or others long resident in Africa knew they had gleaned with greatest difficulty. But witchcraft was there, a hooded snake blocking the path of real understanding between white man and black.

Much of it was mixed up with ancestor worship. If a man was forced to perform some uncongenial task for his mother-in-law (and these matriarchs could be most exacting) he did so muttering to himself *ukuti abwela* (lest he return), knowing fully well that if he neglected his duty the *fiwa* of some forbear would enter into him immediately. If a certain ghost knocked on the wall of a hut in which there was a pregnant woman, all manner of rites of purification had to be gone through before this bad spirit could be exorcised.

Belief in witchcraft permeated the everyday life of the Bemba, and the men and women feared because of their supposedly supernatural gifts kept all kinds of evil medicines in horns and stored these in secret places, while most people in trouble visited the local diviner who, for a small sum, would rattle a few bones and find by so doing a solution of all difficulties. Sometimes this habit had its amusing side, as in the case of one of the wash-boys. He left, but returned to accuse the remaining wash-boy of stealing his loin cloth, a most objectionable piece of rag. Amid fearful indignation

the accused one sent his son with two pennies to the diviner up the valley, but that wily gentleman sent back a message saying he could not possibly divine who had stolen the cloth or where it was without payment of another tenpence. This was made and the verdict was that if the accuser would dig under the mud floor of the accused's hut he would find not only his cloth but three of the *Bwana*'s shirts as well! So far as I know the *Bwana* is still shy of three shirts. As dispenser of justice and final court of appeal for all local troubles he could scarcely follow the ruling of the diviner.

Despite James's definite refusal to discuss witchcraft I tried him again, armed this time by odd pieces of knowledge picked up from those wiser than myself. "I have been told of a man who died and his relatives said the *fiwa* had entered into him. But the white doctors said he had died from some powdered root which had been sprinkled on his nostrils and upper lip while he slept. He breathed it into his lungs and it choked him."

"He was witched, *Mama*."

"I'm not so sure. There are a few old men and women who sell evil medicines out of horns, aren't there?"

"I do not know of them, *Mama*."

"Well, don't you think that if your last wife wants to wish you ill she probably pays somebody to put a poisonous herb in your food?"

"No, *Mama*, she just witches it."

There you were: *she just witches it*. In that phrase was summed up the whole attitude of the Bemba towards witchcraft, yet somehow I could not make myself believe that this was so wicked and unnatural as the missionaries made out. Indeed, I shared the sneaking suspicion of several white people that it had originated quite legitimately from the taboos placed by tribal law upon various crimes and vices, notably upon immorality, and that if it had become an influence for evil then the change had been regrettably, although possibly innocently, fostered by the very men who

ranted against the deplorable "phallic worship" and "black magic" of the native. Dr. Audrey I. Richards,<sup>1</sup> who probably knows more about the Bemba than any living European, hits the nail on the head when she describes this magic as "protective magic"; that is, a magic which is resorted to in order that one who has sinned may win expiation of that sin.

Tribal law, as I learnt mainly from Mulemfwe, was exceedingly strict in the days when the chiefs, ruled by the paramount chief, Chitimukulu, were the sole governors of the tribe. Crime of the least kind was punished by mutilation, by torture or by death, and family life was scrupulously guarded, so that if any person offended against the code he or she speedily bought charms and medicines, made sacrifices to their *mipashi*, performed all sorts of rituals and undertook heavy tasks in the hope that all this evidence of regret might bring forgiveness from the chiefs. Certainly some of the laws, ceremonies, customs and punishments were crude and, to our minds, strange and cruel—but then the Bemba was by no means "a gentle savage." He practised polygamy, but each wife was allowed to bear but one child every three years. A young girl, on approaching adolescence, was handed over to her prospective husband for a kind of trial marriage and during this time the youth had to prove to his mother-in-law that he was a hard worker and a suitable mate, while afterwards the girl had to undergo a bewilderingly complicated initiation to womanhood known as the *cisunga*, when the old women of the tribe instructed her in the duties of wife and housekeeper. Divorce was fairly common, and the reasons for it were sometimes extraordinary; but on the whole the native ways were sensible and sound. Any insistence upon sex matters seemed perfectly comprehensible among a people to whom birth, marriage, and death were all-important, and far worse cases

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Audrey I. Richards, anthropologist and author of many articles on the tribes of North-eastern Rhodesia.

of immorality and cruelty than any known to the Bemba are almost daily reported in the English Press.

But with the coming of the white men the chiefs lost power and the lives of the tribesmen were strangely altered. "You must only have one wife," said the missionaries; so the Bemba obligingly agreed and resorted secretly to illicit liaisons which caused them so much heart-burning that they flung themselves willy-nilly into the waiting arms of witchcraft. "Here is the Bible," said the missionaries; and the Bemba listened quaking to more tales of magic than he had ever heard (for to him the Old Testament stories, the parables and the miracles, are sheerest magic). "Throw away all your charms, your potions and your shrines, and wear proper clothes," said the missionaries; so the Bemba burned his "protective magics" and spent many *tikkis* on fourth-hand shirts and trousers which, as he had no idea of washing them, gave him itch, a disease that soon spread to his mind as he remembered the heap of ash which was all that remained of his household gods.

Fear grew in him, a secret, gnawing fear which led to many disasters.

Maybe it led to the visitation of the Bamucapi in 1934. These were a group of astonishing young men who travelled in trains and lorries, dressed themselves up in striped shirts, plus-fours and billycock hats, and announced that they came from a supernatural being in Nyasaland called Kamwende. They had come, they said sternly, to eradicate witchcraft from the Bemba and they were able to detect all sorcerers merely by looking at their reflections in a mirror. Now the Bemba are simple men full of credulity, and to them mirrors are awesome objects, so the Bamucapi were received with admiration which rapidly changed to wonderment when they not only pounced upon several folk as sorcerers but forced them to disgorge their stocks of horns.

In every village piles of these horrific objects grew to immense proportions. Horns of duiker, of roan and other

antelope, of buffalo and eland; gourds and pumpkins full of dusty substances; little bags of lizard and snake skin—all were there, and all might contain evil and potent charms.<sup>1</sup> Most of them didn't, but the fact remains that the stylish young Bamucapi with their European dress and their gibberish about mirrors succeeded in dragging every darkest secret of the tribe to light. The people were thrilled, and the punishments meted out to suspected sorcerers were uncomfortably reminiscent of the war-like days when the old Chitimukulus removed eyes, ears, and noses from obstreperous followers.

On the surface, however, it was a splendid affair altogether. The Bamucapi were most generous in paying *tikkis* to villagers who broadcast their preliminary speeches; the Government smiled indulgently at this marvellous exhibition of "enlightened" natives casting witchcraft from their brethren; the Churches gazed proudly upon what they imagined to be God's handiwork, and even when the Bamucapi gave vent to sermons which were the weirdest mixture of Christianity and native lore and wove into their exhortations many references to Marya (who, they skilfully explained, was not the Madonna but another spirit) they stirred not hand nor foot. "See," they said comfortably, "what we have done for the black man!"

Very soon they saw in a highly regrettable manner, for these dandies of the striped shirts quickly finished with the throwing out of witchcraft and proceeded to a neat little game of what-you-lose-on-the-swings-you-gain-on-the-roundabouts. They had to recoup themselves for all those *tikkis*, and also for their heavy expenses, so they sold *muti* (a word originally meaning tree but now signifying medicine, which is almost always made out of trees). Presumably everyone had been in touch with a sorcerer; therefore

<sup>1</sup> In her *A Modern Movement of Witch-Finders* (Africa, Vol. VIII, No. 4, reprinted separately), Dr. Audrey I. Richards tells us that out of a pile of 135 horns she examined only 10 were dubious; that is, they might conceivably hold "magic" properties.

everybody had to swallow *muti*—at a penny a dose in order to be cured. Not thoroughly cured, of course, because the exorcism of evil spirits by the Bamucapi was a far more expensive business than that of the ragged old diviner up the valley and it behoved every Bemba to buy pretty packets or stoppered bottles of immunity against this, that, or the other at sixpence a time.

They did so: I do not blame them. Jumpy through twenty-odd years of convert-snatching, bewildered because they were trying to serve their own and strange gods simultaneously, they were swept off their emotional feet by the Bamucapi's marvellous promise of salvation from the ills which beset them. Had not their leader, Kamwende, been resurrected from the dead, a ghastly figure with an eye, an arm and a leg paralysed, yet cherishing in his poor maimed body the secrets of defence against witchcraft?

It was about this point that both Government and Churches awakened from their pleasant dreaming. Out went the Bamucapi—but the harm was done and you may still trace its influence throughout North-eastern Rhodesia and Nyasaland because the feeling of mistrust towards certain of the tribe who were mulcted of horns persists, and the activities of the plausible Bamucapi has aroused a positive frenzy of interest in “witching.”

The average white settler who had spent many years in the district said “I told you so,” which wasn’t surprising. He knew through trial and error just how carefully you needed to deal with the Europeanised native, and a great friend of mine, a dear and forthright old man who had known Rhodes and had fought in the two Matabele rebellions, assisted the Bamucapi on their way with the toe of his boot only to fall sick of heart trouble three days after their departure. “There you are, *Bwana*,” groaned the devoted servants grouped about his bed. “You were rude to the Bamucapi!”

Yet the Bamucapi were the immensely popular folk who were going to drive out witchcraft from the Bemba!

## III

When I went to Central Africa I had the strictest instructions to eschew the white man and to concentrate on the black; but I had not stayed very long in one of the most serene and untroubled spots in the continent before I realised that study of black without white was impossible. The veriest globe-trotter must have had that fact thrust beneath his nose. He mightn't have liked the smell of it, or the shape of it, but there it was in the forefront of his vision, and unless he tried to analyse the effects of his civilisation upon a savage tribe he might as well have remained in England writing, as James so tranquilly remarked, "A book about white people."

And when I left paradise and travelled by devious routes throughout that vast land which is made up of Northern Rhodesia, Tanganyika, and Kenya, I knew ever more urgently the responsibility of Britishers in remote parts of empire. In future chapters I tell of many white men and their influence upon Africa, but here I confine myself to missionaries, not that these are in any way more blameworthy than others, but simply because they are or ought to be the most important people we have in Africa, and because the serpent they breed is hydra-headed. The Churches at home should realise that true Christianity was never taught by rule of thumb, and that a child inveigled by a slate or fish-hook is no convert worthy of the name. They should send out to an intensely difficult task men physically and mentally fitted for their job. I would go further and suggest in all humility that important dignitaries of the various Churches and their philanthropic benefactors should undertake a comprehensive survey of the North-eastern plateau and find out for themselves the real state of affairs. The arrogant idea that the

“poor blacks” are gasping for spiritual sustenance needs revision—but then, of course, I hold the extraordinary viewpoint that Africa is the black man’s country and that we, having appropriated most of it, should behave as guests usually behave towards their hosts. “Send them to the colonies,” is a vague and satisfying solution applied to all those whose mentality makes an awkward mouthful for home consumption, but nobody ever admits that these unpalatable titbits cannot be swallowed in London, Edinburgh or Rome, and there is always the tacit understanding that the colonies, those horrid places full of black men whose only virtue is that you may count their conversions much as an Indian brave counts his scalps, have cast-iron digestions.

The most sincere Christianity I saw practised in Africa was at the house I made my headquarters. Here, every Sunday morning, the *Bwana* held a short service for his family and his guests. It was extremely simple, two lessons from the Bible, the Lord’s Prayer, and a second prayer; and absolutely no pressure to attend was brought to bear upon the servants. It was just made clear that Christian folk set great store by this service, and various dark figures would sidle into the hall to listen to it. Always, I noticed, the lessons concerned things which they could understand; always the audience stayed quietly, their brown eyes very round, until the *Bwana* had finished.

## IV

Like a child forbidden to touch the jam, I still sneaked cautiously round the subject of witchcraft, and while I never won any vital information I did achieve a slightly fuller knowledge of the Bemba’s beliefs. From Aggeness, whose function in life was to help—or hinder—the children’s governess, I learnt about the dire penalties liable to fall upon those who did not adhere to the betrothal, marriage-payment and initiation ceremonies. “Protective magic”

worked very hard in this affair. The prospective husband did not actually pay over any money for his bride, but had to toil in the garden of her parents—if he scamped a little bit of digging there was no saying what *fiwa* might be wished upon him. The girl, about a year before the onset of puberty, had to take up her abode in her husband's hut, sweep this clean daily and fetch water for him. Her mother cooked their food and kept a watchful eye on the couple's relationship, which was not yet sexually complete. Only if the girl had not offended against custom, thereby bringing the ghosts of innumerable ancestors about her head, was she brought home when the probation period was up and instructed in the *cisunga* rites. At this stage she was shut securely in a hut, surrounded by fearful old gargoyle of grandmothers and aunts who gave her crude drawings and dances and songs supposed to represent her future duties. Now she was presented with *mbusa*, pieces of pottery handed down from generation to generation, and finally she was washed in running water, coated with white clay, and carried in style to her husband's hut by a paternal aunt.

With much rolling of the eyes from Aggeness and quite shameless interpretation by James, I gathered that if the least item were omitted from this programme the wrath of all *mipashi* opened on the bride's head—directed, of course, by the gargoyle who seemed to me definitely the most vicious influence in the tribe. Studying these horrid old women I realised in startling fashion just what matrilineal ruling meant. They knew strange methods of birth control, they performed abortions as conjurors perform sleight of hand, they possessed powers which made me shiver. But when I met them by the roadside they would beat their shrivelled breasts, cast their eyes to heaven, and ask piously that Lesa should guide me on my passages through the jungle. Ugh, they were the very breath of evil and looking at them I felt fully convinced that they were the source of all witchcraft.

From Mulemfwe I learnt that if a wife or husband died, the remaining partner must have intercourse with the one whom tribal law had determined as his or her next mate, lest more *mipashi* swoop down to avenge the dead. "And this *kubula mfwa* can be very unpleasant," he said decidedly. "But I will tell you of better magic, *Mama*. When I fought against the Germans in British East (Tanganyika) during the Great War I had a beautiful gun—a real one which fired bullets. Ah, I was happy then. It was a grand feeling walking through the bush with that gun on my shoulder. Very good, the British Army. Now, of course, I am happier still, with the contentment which comes to those who live in peace." His arm circled the valley as he pointed out the eucalyptus plantations, the citrus groves, the villages and the cattle kraals.

For some obscure reason I quoted Herrick to this old warrior:

"I speak of hell; I sing, and always shall  
Of heaven, and hope to have it after all."

As we pedalled home on our *jingas* James said: "That was a funny bit I translated to Mulemfwe. How can you speak of hell, where the fires and the bad men are, and sing of heaven, where everything sparkles with gold?"

"That was written by a man who lived four hundred years ago."

"Four hundred—that is but a day!"

Desperately I avoided a large thorn bush and changed the subject. "Honestly, James, do you still believe your ex-wife casts spells on your food?"

He rode ahead, a straight-backed figure silhouetted against the sunset. "I told you, *Mama*, she witches it."

## CHAPTER V

## THE KINGS OF THE CROCODILE TOTEM

## I

I WASN'T a stranger any more. Leonard Billy squirted me with his nasty tannic acid; James led me round the country-side with all the aplomb of a showman exhibiting a dancing-bear; Aggeness, Shelassie White, the *capitaos*, the houseboys and their wives and families greeted me familiarly as I passed, and I was beloved in the Tents of Shem.

But my most important friendship was with Mulemfwe. At five o'clock, when the sun was dipping behind Chitané hill and the hot clear air was stirred by a small cold breeze, he sat cross-legged on the ground before his hut, a heaped-up fire of logs in front of him, and spoke words of wisdom. Opposite him I would squat, and between us the faithful James turned his head this way and that, striving to put Chibemba into English and *vice versa*. On the first few occasions I politely offered Mulemfwe a cigarette, regretting that I had no snuff; but pretty soon I desisted since this scorner of smoking promptly scoffed a tin of fifty, set an underling to grind the leaf into powder, and kept the tin as decoration to his hut—or his person, because one who could produce *ticketis* from a tin instead of a fez was clearly blessed.

Never again, perhaps, shall I know such peace of mind as I knew beside Mulemfwe's hut. He was a savage; he had deplorable ideas about the selling of the Bemba women to the Arab traders in days gone by—"One more or less, *Mama*, did not matter"; he had a lot of wives, and a lot of witchcraft, and mighty little Europeanisation; but he simply happened to be a very great gentleman. With a stateliness I have never seen equalled in ambassadorial circles he

brought forward various members of his vast family and explained who they were, what they did for a living, all about them. They were a little confusing, since quite a small child would be introduced as a son while a man of about thirty would turn out to be a grandson, and I was never sure which of the women who peered inquisitively from the hut doors were Mulemfwe's wives.

Sometimes friends appeared to show me rough wooden cooking-utensils they had made. Being a fighting race the Bemba were unskilled in handcrafts so were immensely proud of their crudely fashioned basins and spoons. At other times men brought books and proffered them shyly. One or two of these were primers compiled by the White Fathers in a most ingenious way, Bible stories alternating with illustrated tales of birds and animals. Often the owners of the books could not read them and then a child was brought forward to spell out the Chibemba words laboriously, but always the possessor of these small, tattered manuals was regarded with slight awe by his fellows.

No women joined the throng round the fire; indeed, apart from the wives of the house-boys, who lived in the house compound and were therefore more used to white folk, the only women I really talked with were Nelson's wife and mother. The former was a gentle creature sorrowing greatly over the recent death of a son. She was shortly expecting another baby and we all hoped it would be a strong child, though this seemed unlikely for she was miserably sick and delicate. In common with the rest of their tribe she and Nelson adored their children, and the loss of their poor little boy was a tremendous grief to them. As a visible sign of mourning Nelson had grown a beard and despite his pride in the new school he was sad at heart.

His mother was a grand old woman of remarkable courage and vitality. She had suffered from an ulcerated leg, and not all the attentions of the *Mama* had prevented gangrene from setting in, so this indomitable female was driven to

Kasama hospital, some hundred miles away, where the was amputated from the knee. Now she sat enthroned side her hut, proudly displaying the stump, and she me a graphic description of the operation. "They gave *muti*, *Mama*, which brought me wonderful dreams, and leg smelt so bad that the hyenas came in from the *ju* and howled outside the hospital walls all night!"

But she was a cunning old party. For the first few we she was home again she had been the centre of attracti and people had flocked from near and far to listen to h fantastic tales and to inspect her leg. Gradually, howeve this excitement lost its savour and Nelson's mother wa furious at the subsequent lack of homage. Something had to be done, and I was the very person to do it. "If you speak to the *Bwana* he will take heed of what you say. Tell him that I *must* have a wooden leg. There is a man near the Luangwa who has one and he is very popular."

I pointed to the crutches propped on the mud wall behind her. "But the *Bwana* bought you those, why don't you use them? Besides, I think you would find the wooden leg painful."

She snorted. Anyone could have crutches: she wanted a wooden leg.

What she really meant was that she wanted a renewal of fame. I am sure that in her mind's eye she saw herself strutting round the village followed by an admiring crowd. Such glory! Such magic!

## II

On a windy afternoon we walked down to the cattle kraals to superintend the salt lick. Inside a stockade boys filled long narrow troughs with great lumps of salt while Maké capered madly round them. He had not been expecting us and was in undress uniform, an enormous red and yellow handkerchief draped about him and knotted or

one shoulder. His efforts to clutch this to his body were such that he spun like a teetotum, screaming instructions as he did so, while outside in the fields the cattle kicked up the most unearthly din because they loved the salt lick. Presently the gate was opened and the herd charged in, jostling the weaker and smaller beasts out of the way, clouding the air with the dust from their hooves, butting their neighbours with their horns. Even watching the salt lick was an exhausting process, and when the last lump of salt had vanished Maké was sweating so much that his handkerchief drooped suddenly on his body. Nevertheless, he told for my especial benefit the story of how he had saved his father from the lion, only this time the number of lions was strangely grown from one to six.

"Now we'll inspect the kraals," said the *Bwana*.

These were byres built round courtyards and were remarkably clean and well kept. The Bemba were not used to cattle, were even afraid of them, so the herdsmen were mostly of the Bisa tribe who lived in the swamps near the great lakes and were folk of inferior intelligence. Most of them, like Maké, had squat hairy bodies and abnormally long arms, and they reminded me uncomfortably of the baboons which lived in the forests up the valley. It had been no light task to teach the Bisa how to tend the cattle, and keeping the beasts free of disease involved continual care. Ticks were the worst menace, so to begin with the animals were dipped each day. At first they had fought and struggled, but now they liked their cool bath so much that they slid happily down the chute, floundered through the dip and climbed jauntily up the other side.

~~Even~~ more difficult to rear were the fat-tailed sheep that grazed on the hill-sides. They would die of mysterious complaints, generally infectious ones, and then there was the grim business of dissection so that the illness might be analysed and combated, for the nearest vet was over four hundred miles away and sheep were valuable.

The more I saw of paradise the more I realised the tenacity of purpose behind its creation. The land looked so rarely beautiful, yet destruction stalked through it suddenly and without warning. The surface of the lake was so serene, yet beneath it lurked crocodiles. The Bemba were a delicious race and had adapted themselves remarkably quickly to agricultural pursuits, yet their inconstancy, their "off days," and their restlessness (due for the most part to the transition in tribal laws which was taking place under the influence of white men, but in some degree to the fact that they had ever been a wandering people) combined to make dealing with them a delicate business. Only by hard work, much tact, and a very definite desire to understand the devious ways of the native mind, was paradise preserved. Loyal and good as Mulemfwe and his *capitaos* were it was extremely doubtful whether anything would be left of eighteen years of labour if they had to look after the vast estate without supervision for, say, a year. The citrus groves would wither, the still fall into disrepair, the buildings crumble, and the greedy bush seize back all cultivated land.

When I listened to the *Bwana* or the *Mama* settling problems or striving to introduce new ideas for the betterment of the place I saw very clearly that their firm belief that they were in the position of trustees to this childlike people was a right one. Twice and three times a day small deputations arrived with all manner of suggestions, disputes and questions. An excitable man demanded that the *Bwana* should communicate with his chief and thus enable him to divorce his wife. Oh, yes, she was a good wife in her way and she had reared his children adequately but . . . <sup>h ~ 1</sup> followed detailed description of a quite unmentionable torture to which she subjected him. It was such a horrific story that a white man new to the country would have been disgusted beyond measure; not so the *Bwana*, who judged the whole affair gravely and dispassionately, gave both

husband and wife a long lecture, and managed to restore peace to their home.

One morning James arrived, full of a marvellous project. A cousin of his had learnt the bakery trade in Southern Rhodesia and with their joint savings they thought it would be a splendid idea to open a "tea-shop" in the main village. The cousin would do the work, James would reap half the profits, all the folk who came in from long distances would be able to buy food and the *Mama*, of course, would be kind enough to sell them the flour and rice and fat necessary for their baking.

"Oh, yes," said the *Mama*. "And how many times will the cousin lure the housekeeper into conversation while you raid the store-room and hand out sacks of flour to a waiting piccanin?"

James grinned broadly. He liked when the *Mama* showed she knew all the little ways of the tribe. But he and the cousin would be good, very good.

The cousin was fetched in. He was a jovial person and he chattered at a great rate. The *Mama* heard him out and then proceeded to demolish all his argument. If the tea-shop was to be started it must be run on strictly business-like lines and all ingredients bought from the house must be paid for promptly. Within an hour a sensible scheme had emerged from beneath the extravagance of the Bemba's proposals, and although the roseate dreams of James and cousin fled before the cold light of the *Mama*'s reasoning they were both perfectly satisfied.

More often than not guile had to be met with guile, and on a day when a chief arrived to discuss a plan for the establishment of a central market where the grains from outlying villages might be sold, Shem was called in before the ceremonial palaver started. Being a store-keeper he was conversant with money, with the idiosyncrasies of buyers, with the perils of salesmanship. To him the *Mama* spoke long and earnestly, and he nodded a wise head. There were

so many stumbling-blocks to surmount if the market was to become reality without giving offence to the chief. To begin with, any centralisation of communities was practically unknown to this people continually forced by hunger to move their villages. To end with, the Government had certainly taught the Bemba to use our money, but the units of coinage were woefully inadequate. An article cost a penny, a *tikki*, a sixpence or a shilling. It must not cost fourpence, or ninepence or one and twopence. Whoever instituted this bewildering and ridiculous system may have imagined he was aiding the simple mind of the native, but in cases such as the present the resultant muddle was appalling because the inevitable kerosene tin in which the grain was to be sold held, when full, an amount which ought to be priced at a shilling and some odd pence. On the other hand, if some of the grain was tipped out and an exact shilling's worth left, both seller and buyer would immediately jump to the conclusion they were being swindled.

Quite rightly the *Mama* did not see why the estate, which would have to buy the grain from the growers, should lose three halfpence or twopence on every shilling when they resold it, so Shem, a kerosene tin and a ruler were called into action and it was decided to explain to the chief and his followers that in the central market all tins would only be seven-eighths full.

It was all tremendously complicated. By the time Shem had got the details firmly into his head my own brain was reeling, and I shudder to think what would have happened had the chief been an old man. Fortunately he was young and go-ahead, attired in a natty suit of pale blue pyjamas, and he entered the room with his round face very solemn, his right hand clutching a huge sceptre with an ivory knob. Behind him came his chamberlain and a kind of major-domo <sup>boys</sup> *pe* and following them came Mulemfwe and his *capitao*. <sup>while</sup> *F* <sup>beer</sup> body squatted on the floor with the exception of the <sup>us rec</sup> who sat very stiffly on a hard chair staring at the kerosene <sup>ed or</sup>

There was no question of attacking the subject straight away. The most polite greetings and exchanges of news had to be gone through first—but all the while a dozen pairs of rolling eyes glinted at the kerosene tin. Very subtly the *Mama* steered the conversation in the right direction; then all of a sudden she waxed eloquent.

The chief was no fool. He was extremely anxious for his followers to make money and improve their standard of living; but between him and this longing stood many primitive inhibitions. To watch the *Mama* breaking these down one by one was an education. Never once did she raise her voice, or refuse to answer a question, or show the irritation she must have felt—I should have thrown the kerosene tin at the chief's head. The soft Chibemba speech droned on and on, and the *capitaos* gesticulated wildly while Mulemfwe and Shem grunted in the background and the chamberlain tried to look judicial. I studied the chief's face, striving to fathom his thoughts, but his oily countenance was about as expressive as a lump of coal. About two hours later, when the whiff of native was becoming slightly oppressive, the party broke up.

“Does he agree to the tins being seven-eighths full and being sold in a central market?” I asked curiously.

“He will go home and think about it, and seek advice, and talk much among his people. In the end he will agree.”

Things move slowly in Africa.

### III

I was upstairs on the loggia when James appeared. *With Mama, the musician is here to play his piano to you.*”

I was pleasantly excited. By trade the musician was the busy locksmith and hitherto he had been too busy making his nor ~~la~~ to pay me a visit. “Where is he?”

*Clutch your room, Mama.*”

shadow opened the door and fell headlong over a selection of

weird instruments. Sitting cross-legged on the mat was the musician, a thin, elderly person who grasped what looked like half a tree trunk decorated with iron teeth and bands of wire in both hands. This was a native piano, the biggest he had, and all around him were smaller replicas of it. He played on the iron teeth with his prehensile thumbs, producing tinkling cadences which held all melancholy—and all rhythm, and I squatted beside him on the floor and promptly broke both thumb-nails in my efforts to copy him. So engrossed was I that I failed to notice the amount of people who were crowding in at the door. Livingstone, the boy who was dusting my room, tucked his duster into his apron pocket and began what was known as the "competition" dance with James. In this the men threw their legs out suddenly from side to side trying always to make their opposite partner use the wrong leg and clapping their hands furiously the while. So they danced happily, and in came George, the cook, Akimu, the donkey-boy, half a dozen wash- and kitchen-boys, Cleo's piccanin, Aggeness and her sister *baka-shana*, all lured by the music. First they cheered on James and Livingstone, but soon they could no longer resist the plaintive tinkling and joined in the dance till my room was full of whirling figures. Suddenly the door opened and the housekeeper stood, an avenging angel on the threshold.

"Are you aware that it is eleven o'clock, that lunch has to be ready by noon, and that not one stroke of work has been done by any of you for the past half-hour?"

It really was disgraceful. The servants scuttled back to their tasks, the musician gathered up his pianos and fled, I sneaked guiltily out to the tangerine trees, picked several warm beauties, sat on the wall with my feet tucked beyond the reach of Cleo's predatory beak, and thought dreamily a'boys the Bemba. Fear-ridden, people told you; they died of while their lives were haunted by it. I couldn't believe beer Riddled by superstition and apprehensive of the <sup>us rec</sup> ted or

evil they might be, but they definitely were not a fearful race. Basically, they were wonderfully happy—no creatures of misery could dance, and laugh, and talk as they did; and I was pretty sure that if one of them died after being “witched” he did so not from fear but from some subtle poison slipped into his food.

Yet I felt unhappy about them. Here in Shiwa they were serene, untroubled, simply because they were treated with justice and kindness and kept as far removed from civilisation as possible. But elsewhere? Ah, there was the rub. I had already seen a very little of what happened to these credulous beings when they came under the influence of white people who did not understand how to treat them, and I wondered gloomily how they got on when working their way south to the mines.

James came and stood beside me. “Filuti is out of gaol,” he announced gravely. “He has come down from his hill village to see us.”

This remark saddened me further, because it reminded me that even in paradise crimes were committed. At least, crime according to our ideas. Some time previously the housekeeper had had occasion to go down to the cellars and had found, to her consternation, that large quantities of champagne, brandy, whisky, gin and various wines had disappeared. A watch was set and an agile native detective brought in as an extra house-boy, and it was discovered that nightly before dinner, when the *Bwana* was having his bath, his keys were neatly removed from his dressing-table for a few minutes. For a long time, it transpired, several trusted servants who had been years in the house, had been coolly ~~whelping~~ themselves from the cellars, but as large supplies of liquor and wines were only ordered out from home every busy years and as these were little used except for guests, nor had they been noticed. Surprisingly, the thieves had clutched most circumspect. Never once had there been any shadowy orgy, merely select and secret parties during which

they had somehow managed to put away £90 worth of hard liquor! Only one punishment was adequate—gaol, and the judge at Kasama ordered terms of imprisonment varying from two months to two years; but here the amazing naïveté of the Bemba popped up, for when the lorry arrived to take the culprits to their trial they appeared, handcuffed and wreathed in smiles, to bid the family a loving farewell, and one of the ringleaders said wistfully that he "*bad* liked his champagne in half-bottles!"

Fines were also imposed (for the Bemba greatly dislike paying out money for nothing) and Shem did a roaring trade in second-hand garments, most of which had been given to the servants by the *Bwana*. These now adorned the backs of various villagers, and it was a pleasant game spotting the coat once presented to the erring cook or the trousers gifted to the ex-butler.

And now Filuti, having served his two months, leaned negligently on the kitchen window-sill gossiping with George and dissolving into hopeless giggles when the housekeeper spoke to him. He had even, so we heard later, asked the District Commissioner to retrieve for him part of a month's wages which he said was owing to him. Certainly one of the older thieves who had been a privileged servant had the grace to turn away his head when his master visited the gaol, but on the whole punishment was accepted philosophically and it was useless to point out to the tribe that robbing the cellar was a sin. As the brother of one of the thieves said when asked by the *Bwana* if he did not realise that stealing was wrong, "Stealing is not wrong, *Bwana*, it is being found out that is wrong."

A nice, simple viewpoint.

So Filuti laughed and chattered with his successors, and nobody bore any malice, and I finished my seventh tangerine and ambled round the corner of the house to the schoolroom, where the bi-weekly sewing-class was in full swing. Instead of windows this room had a sliding door which was rec-

wide open all day, and here the children from the villages congregated while the housekeeper and the governess cut out clothes and set seams and the two small girls not only gave instruction in knitting and hemming but played the gramophone for the amusement of their guests. I liked the sewing-class. I liked the woolly black heads bent so seriously above their work, and the brown fingers that fumbled so arduously with needles or knitting-pins, and the pink tongues lolling out between white teeth, and the general air of friendliness that prevailed. Some of the girls would never make much of their tasks, but others really made amazingly successful frocks, jumpers and coat-hangers, and I never tired of watching the two white children coaching their darker sisters.

"Let's go for a walk with Kim this evening," said the governess.

Kim was an airedale, a charming animal who found the world an enchanting place except for the ticks which burrowed under his thick coat, but on this particular day we were late in setting out for our walk up the valley path and the dark came down while we were still about half a mile from home. Immediately the bush seemed to spring to life. Queer rustlings and cracklings sounded all around us and Kim went crazy, hurling himself through the thick scrub in search of some imaginary quarry. Considering that the governess's wail about the dearth of wild life at Shiwa had been almost as high as my own, our subsequent behaviour was cowardly beyond words. We remembered the leopard that had been seen the night before, and the black mamba in the lavatory, and the buffalo on the Mpika road which had charged at sight, and Mulemfwe's careless tales of lion. "Kim!" we chorused frenziedly, but Kim was far too busy enjoying himself to heed us and we had neither collar nor lead. Clumsily we staggered on down the rough path, clutching each other timorously as the rising moon cast odd shadows on the ground. We were idiots, of course, for

nobody ventured abroad after dark without a lantern and a gun, and Kim's delighted yelpings were calculated to arouse the ire of any game within reach. I suppose it took us about half an hour to reach the compound; it felt like half a year, and just as we sighed in relief a trick of moonlight showed a long black *something* lying right before us. We stood stock still. We had no doubts about it. Here was Father Mamba come to avenge the murder of his wife. An obscure remnant of pride prevented us from fetching a boy from the nearby huts and we argued like a couple of ninnies as to who should jump over horror first. Finally, we leapt in unison —the something, on to which I crashed heavily with both feet, was the twisted branch of a tree.

After that I didn't talk quite so much about the scarcity of wild life. Later on I was to talk still less.

## IV

Wherever you went at Shiwa Ngandu you turned instinctively to look for the lake because without occasional sight of its peerless loveliness you knew a curious sense of incompleteness, and each time you glimpsed it you realised the wonder of it afresh. I never could make up my mind which view of it I liked best. From the hill-top where the school was being built at Timbe it appeared as a distant ribbon of intense blue laid beneath the far indigo hills. From the marshes by the Kasakalabwe road where the guinea-fowl came down to feed at dusk it was a great shimmering stretch of azure. From the house it glowed turquoise in an emerald setting, and from the cattle kraals it showed pale, misted and unreal beyond the tall waving reeds. It looked loveliest, perhaps, from the grave on the hillside where an Englishman lay buried, because you gazed right down on its shining oval of cobalt, and from this vantage-point its blueness remained the same whereas from other places it seemed to change continually.

Sundays, when paradise rested, were the days for lake picnics and then we would sally forth in canoes and paddle to the far side. The canoes were very long and narrow and on my first attempt to board one I overbalanced and sat down with a gorgeous plop among the reeds. Nobody ever extricated themselves from any impasse quicker than I did—at any second the Lake of the Royal Crocodiles might live up to its name. They soothed me while I wrung the water out of my skirt and asked tenderly if my sitter was very wet. It was, but one of the grand things about Central Africa was that even if you were soaked from head to foot your garments dried in no time. Besides, on this day we were all going to get wet as when we reached the opposite shore the reeds were so thick that the boys found they could not paddle the canoe through them.

“We'll have to wade, unless you'd like Sondashie to carry you?”

I had one look at Sondashie's spindle shanks and decided to wade. My first step took me thigh-deep, my second precipitated my right leg into a welter of oozy mud. After that I simply hitched my skirt round my shoulders and struggled on through a waist-deep mixture of water, mud and reeds. The elder child, perched on Sondashie's back, called anxious warnings to beware of leeches and besought me to walk more quickly, but there was no hope of haste when your feet had to be tugged free from the bog each time you lifted them, and I was a sorry object when I reached firm ground at last. Not that my feelings of discomfort endured. I sat down, picked the leeches from my limbs and dried myself by lying in the sun, first on my front and then on my back.

Presently we walked on through elephant grass that waved above our heads and gave the illusion of living in a dim, yellowy-green world until we reached a village. The *Bwana* had gone on ahead and we heard him being greeted with immense fervour by the inhabitants. These trooped out to

the "gardens" to meet him, the women clapping their hands to their open mouths and making weird noises, the men applauding and chanting. I came to the conclusion that the royal instinct was missing in me, for I was always acutely embarrassed by the fury of our welcome, but the *Bwana* merely grinned and returned exactly the right answer to every strange shout.

As usual we were escorted to the thatched summer-house affair which graced the centre of every village and was reserved for distinguished visitors, and sank thankfully into deck chairs covered with skins. Then the headman, followed by his relatives, gave individual greeting and told us all the news—at least not quite all, for the *Bwana* had a shrewd suspicion that several enterprising spirits were shooting the delicate sisatonga antelope with their abominable muzzle-loaders, but there was a marked reticence on this subject as the villagers knew full well such shootings were expressly forbidden. There was no race, I thought lazily, who could equal the Bemba in evasion, not even the Russian.

The district, we gathered, had been very dull lately, no divorces, no quarrels, no sudden plagues; but the son-in-law of the headman had a fine new hut which he would be extremely pleased to show the strange *Mama*. I murmured appreciation as he displayed an inner and outer room (really grand as most huts only possessed one), patted the ochre blankets which draped the walls, and stood entranced before a huge calendar depicting the Black Watch drilling on the Esplanade at Edinburgh Castle. "That," I said haltingly, "is my village."

Almost the son-in-law embraced me. He was so delighted to know that I had journeyed all the way from England in a *ndecki* to find in his village a portrait of my own that I hadn't the heart to ask why the pelt of a sisatonga antelope should be pinned on to the wall of his inner room.

Whether it was the bond of Edinburgh Castle or not I do not know, but when I regained the guest-hut the headman

came and knelt before me holding a wooden bowl in which were four small eggs. Just a little *presenti* for the *Mama*; but the bowl was not included in the gift so I had to sit clasping the eggs in my lap and hope they wouldn't crack before I could hand them over to Sondashie's tender care. In half an hour's time, of course, I should have to return the *presenti* by giving the headman sixpence, but any crude haste about this would be frowned upon. The etiquette of African present-giving was a shade bewildering to the stranger, but once you had it fixed in your mind that one good turn deserved another, so to speak, you had at least grasped the rudiments of the business.

Aged men squatted in the sun around us and their *É Mukwais!* filled the drowsy afternoon as they answered the *Bwana*'s questions, chatted to the elder child who sat on his knee, beamed upon myself. It was all very peaceful, but the heat was so intense I wondered if my *presenti* would turn into boiled eggs for tea. Then the boys brought the picnic-basket and the villagers disappeared, not even a piccanin remaining, for it is the height of bad manners to watch your guests eat.

"They must think we have exceedingly queer habits!"

The *Bwana* said seriously, "Sometimes I blame our behaviour terribly. We settle here so arrogantly, we have our wives to eat at table with us and make the natives wait upon us, we let them bring us tea in bed—these things sound trifling, but practically everything we do is an offence against their tribal law."

Rather gloomily we nibbled sandwiches, our minds full of heavy thoughts about Africa.

But as a rule, when on or near the lake, I thought of nothing but the beauty of the scene. I just lay back in a canoe and watched the reflections of the slim-backed boys in the still water, and the changing colours of the distant hills. Sometimes over the side of the boat there would be long black water-snakes, and always there were multitudes of birds in or above the reeds. Diving-eagles, little wild

geese, wild duck skimming and swooping in the sky, white egrets packed so closely on a hummock of marshy grass that they looked like a huge mound of cotton wool, jewel-bright kingfishers and gay, unknown creatures of scarlet and black, and green, graceful herons rising from the shore and dignified saddle-bill storks standing motionless on one leg, their great red beaks glowing against the emerald of the swamp.

Hour after hour I watched those birds and then, when a chill breeze ruffled the lake and odd grunts from the blue shadows at the southern end told us that the hippo were having their evening bathe, we would drift homewards along a shining, moonlit pathway, usually with our hands full of water-lilies and our mouths full of warnings to Kim, whose longing at this hour was to leap overboard and have a swim. Only a very occasional splash betrayed a crocodile and I never glimpsed a rutted brown back or a pair of snapping jaws, but they were there, those cruel kings of the lake, lying in wait for fish for supper—and fish was a dullish dish. How much more toothsome a little piece of airedale or white and human flesh!

On an evening when the moon was full we came up the lake in the sunset and saw the most amazing sight. As the burning sun vanished below the western hills so above the eastern climbed a vast golden moon.

“The natives call this the night when the sun dies as the moon is born.”

I stared, fascinated, at sunset on the one hand and moon-rise on the other, and in a flash the former had gone and the latter was high in a pale sky. Silhouetted against the horizon was the *Mama*, standing up in her canoe and the children called to her softly across the silver water while the *Bwana* and I, inspired by sight of Sondashie alone in another canoe with Kim, began to chant “The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to Sea. . . .”

Out of the magic of the night came a voice: “There’s a messenger in from Mpika—you’re going to the mines on Wednesday.”

## CHAPTER VI

### THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

#### I

THEY said: "The copper mines are our only source of wealth; you'll find them highly interesting."

They said: "You must give us all your impressions of Government when you come back."

They said: "The D.C. will take you out on *safari* on your way north again; you'll love that."

I was ungracious, melancholy and cross. Was I a child to be bribed with a sugar-plum? I refused, positively refused, to leave paradise; indeed, I should emulate the elderly gentleman who had once arrived on a short visit and settled himself down so firmly that in desperation the *Bwana* asked timidly when he was going back to England only to receive the answer: "Well, now the 'Varsity match is over, there's nothing to hurry home for." They had got rid of him in the end by artfully suggesting that as the mail lorry only called every four years he had better go on the one calling next week; but they wouldn't remove me so easily.

It was no good. They soothed me and patted my back and gave me shoals of letters of introduction and a marvellous itinerary made out by the native clerk who always spelt "Saturday" "Seturday," and excused himself by saying, "Typist's error, sah!"

I borrowed the housekeeper's small hat-box, packed it grimly, slammed the lid on the typewriter and heaved myself into the car, for as a sort of sop to Cerberus I was being driven as far as Mpika, where I should catch the mail lorry south.

"The lorry is fearfully uncomfortable," said the *Mama* anxiously. "I wish you'd go by air."

I said with dignity that if I *had* to see the country I'd see it thoroughly.

"And perhaps you'd better take the tin of interchangeable beef?"

This was a remarkably travelled tin of bully handed from the D.C. to the *Mama* and *vice versa* when journeys were undertaken. In Africa, you were never sure of reaching your destination within any stipulated time. I looked dubiously at the tin, which seemed to have been on the go a very long time, and refused it. "It'll do me good to go hungry," I said with a martyred air.

We set off with George in the back, an elegant figure in a navy suit with an enormous scarlet ostrich feather button-hole and James's Homburg hat. He looked slightly odd holding the gun in this rig-out, but he grinned happily because he was going to show off his new clothes to relatives at Mpika. For myself, I gazed sadly at the jacaranda avenue and wondered if I should ever see it again.

Up we climbed and up through clouds of white dust to the ridge that formed the Zambesi-Congo watershed and it seemed as though the wild things of the bush shared my melancholy, for on a stretch of road usually enlivened by buffalo, hartebeeste and other game we saw but one bush-buck skipping across the sandy trail ahead, and even the forest known to the children as "Monkey Town" was deserted. I cheered up as we reached the ridge. The thought that all rivers to my right flowed into the Atlantic and all on my left into the Indian Ocean pleased me, and from our height of over 6,000 feet we could see the vastness of this huge plateau that unrolled itself beneath us.

We stopped at a hill village the chief of which, poor man, had recently gone mad and had had to be removed, protesting violently, to Kasama hospital.

"You see, there are no lunatic asylums in Northern Rhodesia."

I gaped. In practically every village there were men,

women and children who were definitely insane. "Is that why mental cases among the ordinary natives are so neglected?"

"Yes. Sometimes, if they are homicidal, they put them in gaol—not so pleasant for the other prisoners. We have been trying for a long time to start an asylum, but the white people in the neighbourhood of the only suitable building have raised such a storm about it that nothing has been done."

Think of it, a territory of about 288,000 square miles with a native population of around 1,366,000 without a single lunatic asylum! Before I had even digested the enormity of this fact I caught sight of two villagers who should certainly have been under restraint.

The headman hustled forward, his face grave. Had we heard about *Bwana Ross*?

There had been few messengers lately and a dearth of news, so standing in that high, desolate village we heard for the first time of the death of Charles Lindsay Ross. Over sixty years old and famous as a white hunter, he had been Elephant Control Officer to the Government for several years. He knew more about elephant than most men and, although it was his job to hunt the rogues and the marauding herds that trampled and uprooted the native gardens, he loved them. They were the gentlemen of the jungle, and when his time came, he said, he hoped to meet death through one of them. He had his desire. From Serenje he penetrated far into the bush on one of his periodical tours, wounded a rogue, lifted his gun to fire a second shot—and had a misfire. The rogue charged and tossed him into a tree before his boys could shoot. Very gently they lifted him down and carried him a little way, but his back was broken and soon he signalled to them to lay him on the ground. He was finished. He knew it and told them to bury him there in the jungle he had known so well. Scared and sorrowful they did so, then marched back the long route to

Serenje with the news before returning to their own villages. Two of them stood beside the headman while he told us the story, their dark faces downcast. "*Bwana* Ross was good," they said, "and he was glad to die as he did."

Later on that day I was to learn that officialdom entirely failed to realise that this fine man had died as he wished in a place he loved. When the news eventually filtered through the telegraph wires buzzed with futile instructions, and almost a month after his death an expedition was sent to exhume his body and bring it all the way back to the ugly little European cemetery at Mpika for burial.

But in this tiny hill village the natives who had been with Ross mourned him sincerely and simply, understanding to the full how peacefully he had met the agony which must have attacked him after that mad toss into the tree. Listening to them I felt awed: sudden death was so near in this country, so little feared, and not all the game-lore in the world could save you from it.

The headman asked if I had ever seen elephant meat being cooked, as one had been killed nearby a few days ago and they were now preparing the meat. I shuddered, but followed him to the far end of the village where great strips of flesh were drying on a rough wooden grill erected above a large fire. The dried meat would last them for many weeks—a most delicious treat. It was curious, but I was far more conscious of the size of the beast now that I saw one all cut up than ever I had been before. No fewer than four fires were being stoked and enormous piles of meat were strewn about the place, while the headman dragged forward first the tusks, colossal things of a disappointing dirty, yellowish-grey, and then a fore-foot that was like a young tree-trunk. He looked at this, looked at me and rubbed his stomach in glee. Overcome by the awful smell but determined not to be outdone I rubbed my own, whereupon someone was sent scurrying off for a strip of fresh meat—an even greater delicacy than the dried flesh.

We presented the strip to George, who clasped the horror to his bosom and rolled his eyes ecstatically. All the way into Mpika the stench grew worse and it hung in my nostrils for days afterwards.

## II

I felt like Little Orphan Annie when I was deposited in Mpika. The truth was I had grown terribly spoilt. Since my departure from Southampton I had never once had to act or think for myself. People had heaved me in and out of aeroplanes and cars, ministered to my every want, even washed me. I now suffered the penalty for lotus-eating.

Mpika itself was a sad blow. Somewhere in an optimistic guide-book I had read that it was a "flourishing little township," but found it consisted of the Boma (the D.C.'s office), his house, a tiny hospital, two decrepit Indian stores, and a hut which I was told was the gaol. There was also a nine-hole golf-course, but nobody ever told me why that was there. Five miles away was the aerodrome, on which was the hotel. Glancing up as I entered I saw its name on the porch, *The Crested Crane Hotel*. Oh, shades of Cleo!

There were quite a lot of people in the Crested Crane. There were the genial proprietor and his wife and the wireless operator; and there were several guests. Vision of Mpika had not prepared me for guests, but apparently they had descended upon it by lorry and plane. They were all exuberantly friendly. A languishing blonde with an infinite capacity for whisky gushed to me about the beauties of Broken Hill, where she had been (most suitably) a bar-maid. A stout elderly gentleman with an ulcerated leg assured me he was the cleanest-bodied man in the Territory. An Irishman with kidney trouble argued hotly as to why I must go to the Victoria Falls. I drank a beer with the fascinating name of *Tusker*, and felt completely bewildered

by this sudden social life. Everyone seemed to know everyone else and the air was thick with scandal. Fancy that Mrs. So-and-So from Kasama running away with that good-for-nothing young somebody-or-other! Wasn't it dreadful to bury Mr. —— without a coffin, only wrapped in a Union Jack? Of course, it was a bit awkward because he chose to die on a Saturday, in the hot weather, and the man who held the key of the coffin shed had gone hunting over the week-end, but really, a Union Jack! Imagine that S—— of the road transport saying he had been bitten by a King Cobra when everyone knew they weren't found nearer than the Sudan! But it was a complex, it ran in the family. . . .

I couldn't resist it: "You mean, King Cobras ran in the family?"

Everybody stared at me. Maybe they thought the altitude had sent me *gaga*. "Where've you been staying?" demanded the cleanest-bodied man.

I told him. "Mm. Wonderful spot, I believe. Tons of money."

The remark was wholly untrue. I said so and the whole wrath of the company opened on my head. It was my first experience of the astonishing jealousy which exists among certain white people in Tropical Africa, a jealousy which eats into their minds until they invent the most cruel and malicious stories about those they envy. Within the next two hours every settler of note, every Provincial or District Commissioner from Lake Tanganyika to Lusaka was criminally libelled.

The altitude again?

Despite the fearful activity of the Crested Crane it seemed impossible for me to send a telegram to Kenya, buy a stamp, or book an air passage for my return journey north, and the reason given caused my complete collapse—it was "early closing day" in Mpika! When I recovered Mr. Wireless offered to send the telegram, the blonde sold me a stamp, and the hotel proprietor sat down forthwith and wrote

pages to the aerodrome at Broken Hill (I was to reach it long before the letter) explaining my plight.

I said, "Has the ground staff here an early closing day, too?"

"Oh, no. He's gone off to search caves for bushman drawings as there isn't another plane due until to-morrow night."

I swallowed *Tusker* thoughtfully and wished they employed women at airline stops. It seemed to be a grand job.

"And don't you take the sausages at breakfast, dearie," warned the blonde. "They put too much spice in them and they're awful things for returning on you."

I asked hastily when the lorry left.

"Well, it's scheduled for six, but Mr. L—— has a wireless set he has to pack up and he doesn't feel like doing it to-night, so if you ask to be called at six-thirty that'll be great. The driver can't leave without you and you won't be finished breakfast before seven."

"Where is the driver? I haven't seen him yet."

"Oh, we wheeled him to bed early on this evening."

A pleasant outlook for four hundred miles in a Diesel-engined lorry. I retired to bed, reflecting that Northern Rhodesia was a funny place.

Next morning, as I nibbled sausage a trifle apprehensively, I heard a fragment of conversation from the lounge. "She's forty and married. She writes books, and she's been to Russia, and she's got the hell of a lot of money because she came out by flying-boat."

"My Gawd!" said the blonde's voice.

I jumped. Could this be fame—although it was a pity they had got the money bit wrong. Then I remembered; I had laid my passport and air-tickets on the table last night for a few moments while I was fixing up my return journey. Opportunities are seldom missed in Africa.

## III

The lorry-driver was young, shock-headed, Dutch and very excitable. "How-do, Mrs. Bigland, I guess we'll pal up finely on this trip. Oh, my, but you're lucky, Mrs. Bigland, sometimes we have such a squash we have to sit mighty close, ha, ha! But to-day there's only you and me on board, that'll be grand, eh? Now, if you hop in, Mrs. Bigland, I'll just sign off here, and be out in two ticks."

I crawled out of the Crested Crane. There was an early morning mist and the air had a sharp nip. In the yard stood the lorry. It contained a horse-hair sofa, two bedsteads, several loads of petrol and oil, some large packing-cases, innumerable kerosene tins, one goat, and the entire native population of Mpika. "I thought you said I was the only passenger?"

"Ha! Ha! But you don't go in the back with the bloody niggers! Oh, no, Mrs. Bigland, you come in the cab with me. I can see you don't know this country yet, but you take it from an old-timer that the less you have to do with these stinking blacks the better."

Dumb with fury I climbed into the cab. There would be murder done before we reached the railhead.

The driver rushed round to the front where a miserable boy called Pencilo who had masses of sores on legs and arms was wrapping filthy rags round the starting-handle. He then gripped this and gave a mighty crank, while at the same minute the driver jumped and came down with his full weight right on the handle—and Pencilo's knuckles. It was more than I could endure. "Don't do that; you'll break the boy's hand."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Bigland; he's mighty tough."

Certainly he seemed none the worse, but I shut my eyes until the Diesel eventually thrummed into life. Never have I felt anything quite like the tremors which ran through that

lorry. I twitched like a creature with ague, I couldn't hear my own voice, all my bones crunched madly.

We lurched down the path to the Great North Road, our rattle, bang, crash punctuated by insistent screeches of my name from the driver. Nothing deterred that youth. He kept up a continual shouted monologue while his enormous vehicle bumped over boulders, skidded in axle-deep sand, performed every form of acrobatics except somersaults, and I began to feel that if he called me "Mrs. Bigland" once more I should burst into tears and implore him to use my Christian name. There was only one thing to do—feed him with cigarettes. During the first seventy-five miles which, owing to the appalling road, took us over five hours to do, this little ploy cost me seventy-five cigarettes, one per mile. It was worth it.

Even so, as my ears became accustomed to the terrific din I heard all the driver's life story, and more or less revised my early opinion of him. He was raw, ebullient, snobbish. He had the hatred of the native felt by the white man who fears that some day he may lose his job to one. He was full of vanity and tall stories of game. But he was a darned fine lorry driver, a hard worker, and not a bad fellow at heart despite his horrific views on natives, because several times I caught him doing various small kindnesses to women and children we picked up by the way.

He came, of course, from the Union—"Man, there's a grand country!"—and his father had trekked north to farm near Broken Hill. The usual heartbreak had followed. The land was poor, the cattle died off, the locusts devoured his mealies. And he had seven children. They had made good after much struggling, but still had to help their parents, and this particular son spoke so nicely of his mother that somehow I got a picture of that dour  *vrouwe* in her ram-shackle old farmhouse striving to keep seven youngsters clean and well fed.

"I never had any head for book-learning," said the .

lorry-driver. "I jumped school, oh, my, didn't I! And then I went in for butchery, man, that's a grand trade! But the old — who ran the outfit was so blasted mean to me I quit. D'you know what he did, Mrs. Bigland?"

Thereafter I heard of the iniquities of the butcher, and the hopeless search for another job, and the spell he had had driving hired cars near Bulawayo, and the time he went to the mines, and the girl he had in Pretoria.

"Is she sweet, Mrs. Bigland, oh, my! And her people are so well-to-do, *very* respectable. If we're lucky, we'll get tied up in another eighteen months or so. There's only one thing we quarrel about, she doesn't like me being such a co-respondent."

That roused me. "A what?"

"Co-respondent. Why, man alive, I'm one hell of a fellow at that game!"

My sympathies were with the lady. A professional co-respondent as fiancé sounded rather trying, to say the least.

"Yes, Mrs. Bigland, I co-respond with people all over the world. I just love writing letters, and it's lonely in the evenings, and the pals I make you'd be surprised. I don't suppose I'll ever meet most of them, but right now I've got a girl-friend in France, and a boy-friend in Germany, and two pals in the States. Maybe when you get home you'd write me yourself from England?"

Light had dawned on me. I said blushingly (and mendaciously) that I should be honoured to co-respond with him from England.

The lorry-driver apart, our morning was highly entertaining. How the natives, whose remote villages were clockless, knew when this weekly lorry would pass the nearest spot to them I never could tell, but small groups of them waited patiently by the roadside, bundles on their heads, friends swarming round them. Some of the men were going to the mines, but the women who were undertaking the same journey had to produce passes proving their

identity, since many who had unsatisfactory husbands had a pleasant little habit of slipping off to the Copper Belt in search of more congenial partners. The charges seemed to me uncommonly severe—twenty-five shillings to Broken Hill spelt a small fortune to the average native; and long arguments ensued with the driver when less than the correct amount was proffered. He had to be stern; it cost his employers a great deal to run the lorry at all, and his fares were up to every sort of trick. One woman slid two half-crowns into a neighbour's hand and then swore blind she only possessed seven and sixpence in the world; another had a baby (carried free of charge) on her back, but when she started to climb into the lorry her shawl came off and the infant was disclosed as a well-grown child of about eight; a third wept piteously and finished up by having an epileptic seizure because she had no money and the driver refused to take her. Tragedy, happiness, contentment and mourning—we found all these by the roadside.

By the time we were some thirty miles south of Mpika the crowd in the back had grown to colossal dimensions. Babies crawled over the sofa and bedsteads, fell off the kerosene tins, poked inquisitive noses into crates. Over the wooden rails which ran round the sides black figures were draped. Some slept, others sang, talked, snuffed, or supped *male* porridge from shallow bowls. I could not see the poor goat at all; he had either been eaten or was buried feet deep beneath the throng.

We jolted on, and every now and again we passed families walking through the bush, the men striding ahead with spears, the women trailing behind with baggage and children. Thus did most of Northern Rhodesia travel to the mines, seeking that chimera of plenty which receded as they tramped on day after weary day, smothered in white dust each time a vehicle passed, half-starved and penniless, racked with debilitating diseases. The journey might take them three weeks or three months; it all depended on the

fortune met with by the way, and it was better to walk beside the road because there was more chance of picking up food and less danger from wild game.

The road itself was a nightmare. The everlasting dust, the deep ruts, the encroaching bush, the overhanging trees combined to make it as unlike a "great" road of any kind as possible. Yet it was the main thoroughfare from the Cape to the north, and those indomitable folk who wished to reach Kenya, the Sudan, even Cairo had come this way. No matter what you did to that road it would never be any better. Armies of men were labouring on various stretches of it when I passed through; clearing it, levelling it, trying to make some foundation to it, but in another few months when the rains came their work would be washed away in a few brief hours. The occasional deep valleys were the worst places, because here were miserable little bridges, steep slopes, rivers that were mere trickles now but would be huge torrents later on.

"I shot a buffalo here the other day," yelled the driver.

I nodded. I had heard so much of his hunting prowess that I was beginning to doubt him. So far as I could make out he had already accounted for twenty-three elephant, while his brother-in-law had a hundred odd to his credit. An expensive family hobby, since a fee of £25 had to be paid to Government for the first elephant shot and £5 for every subsequent one.

"And here's where I picked up a lioness in the headlights when I came south by night. Was she scared, oh, my! So I stopped, propped the gun on the mudguard—and got her fair and square through the forehead."

I said, "Oh, my!" The habit was catching.

Incidentally, I kept remembering the blonde's remark about the sausages. What between the tremors of the lorry and the countless cups of tea I had drunk since early breakfast my inside was a shade queasy. Yet you could not refuse the tea, because it was offered you so eagerly by



"THE LORRY"



isolated white men who were superintending road mending or doing some sort of task which involved camping in remote places. They were pleasant people, most grateful for the mail and stores we brought them, most anxious to hear news of England. One or two, however, were pathetic. There was a gaunt, elderly man with shaking hands and very ragged and dirty khaki shorts. Years before he had held a good Government post, but gradually he had degenerated and now he lived far in the bush with several native wives, shunned by his own kind and loathed by the native men. He was seldom sober, being given to brewing strange drinks and—so rumour had it—smoking hemp; and he was intensely cruel. Yet he greeted me with the greatest courtesy, spoke of the London of 1906, handed me smoky tea in a chipped and handleless cup, and I sipped uneasily and tried to ignore the cringing dark figures of his harem in the background.

We picked up more passengers, and more, and each time we stopped I clambered out and ran round to see how the horsehair sofa was bearing up under the strain. The last time I saw it the goat had emerged from limbo and was sleeping on it, so I did not envy its ultimate owner.

“Ach, they’ll cover it with chintz,” said the driver.

Horsehair, chintz, ticks and other livestock. A nice drawing-room piece.

About noon we panted down a side track and came out beside a *dambo*.<sup>1</sup> There were a lot of notices saying that this was a private house and that was a guest-house and no picnics were wanted and would the natives mind taking their unclean bodies into the neighbouring compound, but as there was only one house visible with a small courtyard behind it and as picnics were unknown I couldn’t quite see the force of all these injunctions. “Lunch here,” said the driver.

A mosquito-netted door burst open and out dashed a

<sup>1</sup> A plain beside or near a river.

spare figure. "Hullo? Come and have some lunch. I make most of 'em pay for it but I like your face so you can have yours for nothing."

He was a dear. Most people who visit the territory for big-game hunting know Captain Mills, for he has taken men from nearly every part of the world on *safari*. Indian Rajahs, American millionaires, famous shots from all European countries—precious few of these have not hunted with him. The long sitting-room of his house was unique, at least I found it so because everything in it, from the lion, leopard and buck skins which covered chairs and floor to the horns on the walls were the result of his prowess with the gun. By the fireplace was a pair of elephant tusks and ranged round the room were the most wonderful photographs of game.

But on this day Captain Mills was sad, because he and *Bwana* Ross had been inseparable friends. Many stories he told me of their hunting expeditions and these were never exaggerated, for men who have lived so long in the bush do not tell you fantastic tales of hairbreadth escapes and violent perils—it is left to the visitors who go out on one *safari* and miss everything they see to do that. "Stay overnight," he begged me, "and watch my guinea-fowl when they come down to feed on the *dambo* at dusk. I wouldn't shoot one of them for the world. And this afternoon I'd take you out; we might have a chance of seeing the albino zebra."

The lorry-driver was horrified. I was in his charge; he had to deliver me—together with the kerosene tins—at Kapiri Mposhi railway at a certain time; there wasn't another lorry through for a week and how did I think I was going to reach the mines?

I said, "Oh, damn the mines," and Captain Mills offered to run me south on the morrow.

But the driver was adamant. He seemed so agitated and perspired so profusely that I weakly gave in and clambered into the hated cab. He knew the country far better than

I did, and after all there were several people who had offered to put me up at various places and I couldn't let them down.

So we said good-bye regretfully and bumped off to the accompaniment of screams from the wretched natives in the back.

"You see, Mrs. Bigland," said the driver severely, "it wouldn't have been *right* of me to leave you there. Fancy a lady like yourself staying the night alone with a bachelor!"

I was furious. Imagine having missed seeing an albino zebra because of this little idiot's *fin de siècle* views on morality! I simmered with rage throughout the long hot afternoon and my temper boiled over when a road supervisor who gave me tea in his tent told me he had spent the morning on an ant-hill watching a father, mother and two baby elephant at play only a mile away. "They're most amusing to watch. The babies imitate everything their mother does and are highly intelligent. Why don't you stop over for a week? We'd be sure to see them, or another herd, again. This place is stiff with them."

I glowered at the driver's back. If the idea of my staying alone with a bachelor for a night upset him, goodness knew what would happen if he realised I contemplated a week's camping with a much-married man (the supervisor had five children). "Can't you stay here with the lorry for the night?" I asked wildly.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Bigland!" His voice was shocked. "We carry His Majesty's Mails."

Half an hour later I got my revenge. We were chugging up a long slope when we stopped with a jerk which nearly flung me through the windscreen. "Buffalo, by God!" Before I could get my breath the driver had seized his gun and slipped out of the cab.

Far to the left I saw a great grey shape moving through the bush. This was fun! I followed the driver, but he waved me back.

"He might get your wind," he hissed.

I didn't want to spoil sport so I hovered on the edge of the bush. The buffalo disappeared; so did his hunter. For two solid hours I waited, standing first on one leg and then the other, anxiously listening for the sound of a shot. At last the driver returned, dejected beyond measure. "Not a sign of him," he muttered, as he put his gun in the corner of the cab.

I squinted down my nose. "And what about His Majesty's Mails? You've wasted two hours."

"Man alive, you wouldn't have had me miss a buffalo for the sake of a few bags of mail?"

I sniffed, remembering the albino zebra and the elephant.

The driver carried on gloomily. He always reckoned to shoot the week-end meat for himself and his brothers between Mpika and Mkushi. Now he'd have to expend ten shillings on a sheep.

We purchased this poor animal at a big farm. "But you're not taking it alive?"

"Sure, I'll slaughter it when I reach Broken Hill to-morrow evening."

That sheep worried me for the next twenty-four hours. It stood quaking in the back, hemmed in by black legs and securely tethered by a horribly short rope to the railing. It had no food and no water. It spent the night in the lorry with the goat, which was still enthroned on the horse-hair sofa. Nobody bothered: what was a mere sheep?

#### IV

As the night came down we neared Mkushi where there was a rest-house. "Fine, new place," said the driver. "Lovely scenery, too, beside a waterfall."

I looked at the precipitous mountain-side which slid away before us. "Do we go down that?"

"Oh, yes!" He slammed the gear lever into first and we

slithered into nothingness. We had no lights because they had gone wrong, the moon had not yet risen, the waters of the river roared frighteningly, the lorry swayed and bucketed and rolled. How we reached Mkushi alive I do not know; but somehow we did and I crawled out aching all over into an icy atmosphere, for the valleys, not the hill-tops, are the coldest places in Tropical Africa. A *capitao* appeared hunched up in a great-coat, saluted and took my baggage. The rest-house was certainly a nice, clean little place, but the cold bit into my very bones and I sat huddled and shivering on the verandah scowling at utter blackness and wondering how I was going to get through the night without freezing to death. The driver seemed impervious to the elements, to the darkness, to everything save the sweet comfort of Mkushi. "The *capitao* says will you go and choose your tins for supper."

"My what?"

They led me into a room lit by a small and feeble lamp, opened a cupboard and showed me piles of tinned food. "You choose, and the *capitao* cooks it for you."

I studied the products of Mr. Heinz with a practised eye, selected a large tin of mutton-broth and one of kippers, and felt slightly cheered. "Now can I have a whisky; I'm so cold."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Bigland! No liquor kept here. Besides, Mrs. Bigland, you're better without it. I'm a teetotaller myself, and I know."

The man was a pest. "Well, tell the *capitao* to light a fire, anyway."

Presently he arrived with a shovel-full of smouldering logs, sprawled full-length on the floor and blew at them violently, sending clouds of smoke into the room. Coughing and blinking I watched him and dreamed, most regrettably, of bottles, gallons, vats of whisky. But the fire burned up and I squatted on the hearthstone toasting my back and felt a little better. Unfortunately, through the hatchway which

opened to the kitchen, I caught sight of a piccanin supping my mutton-broth from a spoon. It was too much. Hunger was gnawing at my vitals and I had paid treble the standard English price for that tin. Summoning my small stock of Chibemba I spoke to him sharply. He paid no heed, nor did the *capitao*, and the driver had vanished. By the time he returned the piccanin had taken at least half the broth and gaily poured half a pint of water into the pan instead.

"Ach, they aren't Bemba," said the driver. "Try them with kitchen Kaffir."

I didn't know any: I sulked.

Supper arrived at last, and despite the *capitao*'s unpleasant habit of breathing on the spoons, knives and forks and then polishing them on his dirty great-coat I pounced on my soup-plate. The contents were three-quarters water, there was no bread and no butter, the kippers had mysteriously dwindled in number. "Tea?" I demanded. No, there was no tea, but there was some "fine cold water, the best drink in the world."

"The *capitao* says there are lion about. They snatched a woman from the next village yesterday. Often they roar by the waterfall at night."

I was interested, but the driver much preferred to tell me more of his experiences while running the lorry. "Man alive, it's the lady travellers I'm afraid of in this job! Are they fast workers? Well, I'm a good, clean man, and I tell you I always lock my door here when I have lady passengers. Oh, my, yes!"

I pushed back my chair, rose and announced I was going to bed. "There's only one blanket. Can the *capitao* find any more?"

He found four rather doubtful ones, shook them out before my gaze, and pointing to each repeated, "One shilling."

Recklessly I seized the lot. Four shillings for extra bedding was better than being frozen, although altogether

my night at Mkushi seemed to be going to cost the equivalent of a night at the Savoy.

Grinning widely the *capitao* produced two enormous keys which he laid ostentatiously on the table.

The driver helped me along the verandah with my blankets, lit my candle and turned to go. "Don't forget to lock your door, Mrs. Bigland."

I said, "Oh, my!" nastily, and left it unlocked—for a space. Insinuating myself under all the blankets, plus my tweed coat and skirt, I wondered sleepily if I should hear any lion. I hoped so, oh, how I hoped so! I awakened a little later to the most appalling noise and lay quaking in the darkness. Deep, terrifying roars filled the night—and myself—with sheer unmitigated panic. I would have got under the bed except that I was fully certain a lion was already there, so near did those awful sounds seem. One particularly dreadful bay ended in a prolonged howl which galvanised me into frenzied activity. Lugging my blankets behind me I sprang out of bed, feeling that to be eaten alive was preferable to lying in terror. Somehow I lit the candle, proved that my enemy was not under the bed, staggered across to the door and locked it. Not that the flimsy wood was any protection against lion, but the action gave me faint comfort. Then I drew aside the curtain and peered out fearfully. The moon had risen and I could see the waterfall gleaming silver between the two high escarpments which guarded it; and on these, in silhouette against the sky, were two dark shapes. Hastily I dropped the curtain and fled back to bed. The roars went on. The candle guttered in its socket, casting fantastic shadows round the little room. A hyena yelped sharply outside and I fell into a cold sweat of fear which did not release me for hours. Never again, so long as I lived, would I hope to hear lion roar. An eternity later, or so it seemed, I dropped into an uneasy sleep in which I dreamed of being torn limb from limb like the woman in the neighbouring village.

At dawn I awakened to silence. With the stalwart courage which so often follows an attack of physical fear I rose, washed in icy water, and tripped along to the sitting-room. The driver was not yet up, and the *capitao* informed me by pantomime that I could buy a tin of coffee, that he would milk the wretched goat of sofa fame, and that he had a packet of biscuits, price sixpence. Then he dragged forth a huge alarum clock, twiddled the hands until they pointed to seven, and nodded furiously. I nodded in return and walked out to view Mkushi.

The waterfall looked lovely in the pink dawn-light; the bush looked lovelier for it was very green, and by some trick of the sun's rays on its tree-tops these were turned into fairy-like spires, castles and citadels—what the Bemba called “cities of light.” Prowling round the yard I found an ancient but serviceable *jinga* and decided to go for a morning spin down an inviting path. Bowling along happily, invigorated by the crisp air, I swerved round a corner and saw a strange brown thing stretched out ahead of me. My “classical stupidity” was well to the fore this morning. A cow, I thought, and cycled steadily towards it. But was it a cow? Cows didn't hunch themselves like that, cows didn't have manes. . . . *It was a lion!* With one stupendous heave of the wheel I hurled myself and the *jinga* into a thorn bush and lay there panting. In another second, of course, death would spring at me. Nothing happened. Ever so cautiously I poked my thorn-scarred face through the undergrowth. The very oldest and mangiest lion in Africa was slowly rising to his feet. He yawned, twitched a forepaw, gazed around him with a look of ineffable disdain and ambled off into the bush. I don't think I have ever been so angry in my life as I was with myself at that moment. I had the Kodak with me—and *I hadn't used it!* Incidentally I had to walk back to the rest-house as I had irrevocably buckled the *jinga*'s front wheel, and my body was pierced with black-jacks and thorns.

"D'you hear the lion?" the driver greeted me.

I glared at him. Not for worlds would I have told him of my cowardice.

The *capitao* came in and gabbled something. "He says you took his *jinga* and buckled the wheel. You shouldn't have gone out alone, Mrs. Bigland; you never know what you'll meet, why, man alive, once I. . . ."

"How much does he want?" I interrupted.

"Well, he says five shillings; but don't you part with all that. Half a crown is quite enough."

Hastily I paid out five shillings. After all, I had seen a lion, face to face, unarmed, alone. My spirits rose as I visualised the gorgeous tales I could write about an intrepid woman in darkest Africa; but they fell promptly when I realised that I had not ordered a tin of sustenance for breakfast and that there was now no time in which to heat the contents of one.

"I'll sell you two eggs," remarked the driver cautiously.

He did—and charged me the exorbitant price of three-pence each.

The *capitao* presented the bill and the remains of my tin of coffee which I waved grandly to one side. After all, it wasn't every day I met a lion face to face, unarmed, *etcetera, etcetera*.

v

We crunched biscuits as we thrummed on south and the driver regaled me with yet more stories of his adventures with lady travellers. Suddenly he nudged me excitedly, "Look at that!"

Far ahead a lion and two lionesses lolloped across the road, but by the time we reached the spot where they had dived into the bush there wasn't a sign of them. The driver reached for his gun. "Man alive, I can't see those go."

I said virtuously, "You haven't time. Remember the *mails*."

He had the grace to blush, although I feel sure he has wished many times since that he had disregarded my catty remark, given me a gentle tap with the butt-end of the gun, and gone after his lion. We drove on in silence, stopping every few miles to let natives off and to argue with those who wished to join us. The sun blazed up above the bush, the road grew ever worse, I felt hot, sleepy and disgruntled. Yesterday there had been a plethora of tea; to-day not one white man's tent did we see. Between the jolts and swerves of the lorry I wondered drearily just what insane microbe in my brain made me drag my tired bones round the earth the way I did. (Strange how quickly memory of my lion had faded.)

"We're just coming to Barmy Valley," said the driver.

I roused myself. "Why is it called that?"

"Wait and see," he grinned.

It was a glorious valley, wide and sweet and green, one of the really few fertile places in the Territory; but when a gentleman in khaki shorts, a solar topee and felt slippers rushed out from the roadside and invited me into his house for a cup of tea I began to understand why the valley bore its name. The gentleman was very voluble. He knew more about Rhodesia than any other man in the country, and he wondered if I had an aeroplane because he'd like a photograph of his house taken from the air, and he bore a grudge against the Government, the Colonial Office and all his fellow-settlers. Tripping over the boulders which bestrewed his drive I tried vainly to listen to his spate of speech, but when we rounded a corner and came upon the house I gave up and simply stood agape at the monstrosity which confronted me. In appearance it was vaguely Moorish. The stucco which had once covered its walls had peeled away, the windows were full of broken panes stuffed with old rags, the front door leaned forward drunkenly on half a hinge, one corner of the building had disintegrated

altogether and from the mass of rubble which had once been a wall a cluster of black faces peered inquiringly at me. "This," said my host enthusiastically, "is the way to build a house in Africa. None of those hideous little bungalows with tin roofs, none of your mud huts, none of your jerry-building. The modern generation doesn't know how to build in the Tropics—I built this house to last."

I thought maybe the roof had lasted a bit better than the rest and that that was why he wanted an air-photograph of it, but I followed him indoors to a vast hall with a sort of minstrels' gallery running round it.

"Will you pour out? It's so long since I had a lady visitor to do the honours."

He was most gallant: I couldn't respond.

My chair had three legs. I had to hold the teapot in both hands in case it came to pieces. The cups were handleless. From the gallery a dark and interested crowd watched my every movement. My refusal to stay for the morning gave offence. After a highly uncomfortable half-hour, however, I was forgiven and led out into the garden where my host loaded me with enormous oranges. As there was no basket or sack available I carried them in my skirt and they kept rolling out on to the ground until I reached the lorry.

The driver smirked. "I knew you'd get some oranges."

I said with dignity that they were lovely oranges.

"Oh, yes!" he agreed. "Oh, yes!" and heaved them into the cab.

We drove on through Barmy Valley. Six times was I hailed by curious residents, six cups of tea did I drink, six bewildering houses did I inspect—one was an exact replica of a Japanese pagoda, six loads of oranges did I receive. Exhausted by the hospitality, the chatter and the grievances of Barmy Valley I slumped in the cab while its fruits cascaded around me. There were oranges among the gear-levers and brakes, on the seat, under the footboards. We sat on them, trod on them, held them, smelt them.

"You know now," said the driver, "why it's called Barmy Valley."

I knew. My head was swirling with the extraordinary conversations of its inhabitants.

We charged on along a road that was no more than a path. "I hope to peace we don't meet the lorry going north," said the driver, "because if we do it means backing about ten miles."

My "Oh, my!" in answer was rather faint. To back ten yards down the track seemed an impossibility, and we were careering round sharp corners in astonishing manner.

"S'all right, the north-bound lorry must be late."

We were later still, but it didn't do to say so. "Schedule" was the favourite word in all Africa. The English used it, and the Afrikanders, and the Boers, and the Belgians, the French, the Portuguese; even the Egyptians used it, heaven knew why, and the one thing in life which really mattered was to be not before or behind but *on* schedule. Nobody ever achieved this necessity, but the penalty for admitting they hadn't was complete and devastating ostracism from society. Indeed, when I told someone I was glad my publishers didn't live in Africa he studiously ignored me for the rest of my stay despite the fact that he was even later than myself for any appointment. So with the lorry-driver I held my peace, nodded when he reiterated "schedule", forebore to mention buffalo or lion, and cogitated the why and wherefore of this strange absorption with time. I had just come to the conclusion that the timelessness of the continent—endless desert, endless bush, endless tortoise-like movement towards that which had been seized by puny man—was the root cause of it when we ran over a puff-adder and pulled up with a bang.

To the natives in the back a puff-adder was a quite ordinary menace which might be met with any day, yet they were jubilant. With yells and cries they clambered down into the road and ran back to the flattened horror

which still squiggled its way across it. "*Mama, Mama!*" they called, and black arms beckoned me until I, too, descended and stepped gingerly through the dust.

The snake was a nasty object, over four feet long and disgustingly flattened where our wheel had caught it, and something about its dead writhings sickened me, for as I stared at the marks left in the dust by each twitch of that spotted body I felt I was looking at the epitome of all evil. The thing was killed—what right had it to give this grotesque semblance of life? But Pencilo laid an imploring hand on my arm as I turned away and described by gesture that an old man was going to show me the snake's mouth. Everyone gathered round as a toothless creature hobbled forward with a twig in either hand and prised open the jaws to reveal a grey-green cavity decorated with—well, I don't know whether they were fangs or teeth because I cantered back to the lorry after one brief glance only to find that the driver had disappeared.

"*Dambo, gun,*" said Pencilo simply, and pointed to a minute figure ploughing through the high grass far to our right.

"Schedule," I giggled.

Pencilo giggled back. The meaning of the word was nothing to him but he knew a good joke when he heard one. We sat down on the running-board and sucked oranges, but always I kept glancing over my shoulder at that puff-adder. Was it my imagination or had it wriggled a trifle nearer? Hadn't I read somewhere that a snake could live with a broken back? I couldn't bear it. "Here," I held out a sixpence to Pencilo and pointed to the snake. "Throw it into the bush."

"*E, E!*" He went off at the double, picked the horror up by the tail, brought it back and laid it at my feet. With one bound I was in the cab. Why, oh why, hadn't I the gift of tongues? I knew the puff-adder was dead, very dead, yet each fresh convulsion of its body filled me with

terror, and although I tried to read, to stay myself with more oranges, to keep my eyes fixed on the *dambo*, my glance strayed back to it.

Discomfort grew. The noonday sun blazed on the roof of the cab; a host of flies, attracted by snake and oranges, descended upon me; the natives in the back came and pestered me for cigarettes, and I realised sadly that these rather furtive creatures so different from my dear Bemba had degenerated through contact with white men. They were at once sly and bold, their childish curiosity was changed into a slightly insolent inquisitiveness, their free carriage had become a swagger.. Even Pencilo, who really was doing his best to entertain me, had a certain cringing familiarity which annoyed. I ached for Mulemfwe and James and the happy, dancing folk of paradise, and felt ever more depressed about the state of Africa.

The sound of a gun-shot sent us scuttling to the edge of the *dambo*, and presently Pencilo gripped my arm and pointed to the west. All I could see was the waving elephant grass, but in a little while three tiny figures could be seen bobbing up and down, and as they came nearer men, women and children made a concerted dive towards them, whooping as they went. The driver had shot a bush buck—and who knew what tit-bits he might have to give away?

Then and there, on the roadside, the buck was disembowelled, a rude expression perhaps, but the only true one, so true that I even gazed at the puff-adder in preference to looking at heaps of what the most optimistic European butcher could scarcely call “edible offal.” Everyone was jubilant except the driver, who bitterly regretted that ten shillings expended on the poor sheep. “Oh, man,” he moaned, “I shouldn’t be so impetuous. Always hasty, I am.”

There didn’t seem much haste about leaving the lorry—and the Mails—untended for almost three hours, but I sympathised politely until, soothed by my kindness, he insisted that I should accept a joint of buck.

"It is very kind of you, but I have nowhere to put it."

"Ach, you can carry it. Buck's a grand delicacy. Whoever you're going to stay with will welcome you with open arms."

Maybe they would, but somehow I just didn't relish the idea of arriving on the doorstep of a perfect stranger laden with oranges and buck. Kapiri Mposhi, where there was a railhead and a whole lot of civilisation, would be admirable as a place in which to dump these embarrassing adjuncts to travel.

For the *n*th time I displayed my ignorance of Africa.

We chugged on slowly for a short time and then the lorry decided it could no longer do battle with The Great North Road and wheezed sadly to a standstill. From a highly technical explanation larded with many curses I gathered that it would be at least a couple of hours before the trouble was remedied. "But there's a church a mile or two on where they'll give you tea. We can pick you up when we're finished."

The driver and Pencilo had already divested themselves of their shirts and were bending above the engine. I was thirsty and uncommonly empty, so I climbed out of the cab. "You don't get tea in churches?"

"Ach, yes, you get tea anywhere in Africa. Take the Father's mails with you, that'll please him."

There were two heavy parcels and a bundle of letters insecurely tied together with string. Heaving these under my arm I stood uncertainly in the road. Missionaries again! More arguments, more about schism, more fierce denunciation of other churches, more horrific attacks on the natives. Could I bear it? But my parched throat grew ever more querulous so I set forth. Driving along The Great North Road was uncomfortable enough; walking along it was a nightmare. The sand came over my ankles, the parcels kept slipping, the letters kept dropping, the sun scorched my bare arms. I puffed onwards. Had the driver

said a mile or two? There was no sign of human habitation, only endless bush, and I tramped for a full hour before reaching a small building with a corrugated iron roof. Here, I thought as I stumbled up the pathway, was sanctuary.

A little black boy scuttled round the corner, stared at me, ran away. The door was open so I walked in and found myself actually inside the church. The walls were of rough, uneven brick, the pews obviously home-made, the stone floor covered with sand in which showed clearly the imprints of bare feet. Thanks to the iron roof the air was even hotter than outside, and before the flickering candles on the rudely fashioned altar knelt a small figure in a coarse white robe.

The place was strangely different from the fine brick edifice of the White Fathers just south of Mpika. I was not a Catholic, not a religious woman at all, and my opinion of the average missionary in Africa was not high, yet in this tiny crude church set in the middle of nowhere I slid to my knees on the sanded floor, dimly aware that I was in the presence of a faith which passed my understanding.

The figure in the white robe rose, turned and walked down the aisle towards me. "You wanted me, my daughter?"

I did not explain my sudden arrival. I stammered stupidly, "I prayed, but I do not believe as you believe."

His smile lit his thin, bearded face. "And does that matter? Who am I to preach dogma or creed?" He looked down and saw the parcels and letters scattered on the pew. "You brought my mail, that was kind. Now we shall go to my house and have tea."

His house was a mud hut with a thatched roof, a more primitive dwelling than that owned by many a native. Everything in it betokened poverty—not the usual, casual poverty of the poor white settler, but definite want. The priest squatted before a tiny oil stove and I saw that he was a very old man. He looked sick, too, for his bones showed through his robe and his hands were a network of

knotted blue veins. "The Mail lorry, so often it breaks down and gives us pleasant visitors."

I realised with a start that we had been speaking French to each other throughout our conversation. "What part of France do you come from, Father?"

He was a Provençal, and his home was in that queer small valley which runs beside a rushing river to the *Fontaine de Vaucluse*, so we talked of the paper-mill there, and the hard working conditions of the people, and the legends which abounded in that sweet country. We talked, too, of Avignon; of the view from the gardens of the Popes' palace; of the charm of the ancient walled city; of the *Taverne Riche* with its famous *petits poussins* and its little wild strawberries.

He sat back on his heels. "Those strawberries," he said wistfully. "It is forty years since I ate them; I taste them yet."

A sudden nostalgia for France swept both of us. We forgot Africa, her problems, her beauty and her cruelty and, most regrettably, spoke of the delights our stomachs had known in that far country. But after a short while my host sighed and handed me a cup of tea. "And now I must offer you millet bread and a tin of bully beef. My children will bring them for you; you must see my children."

They pattered in as he clapped his hands, nice, shiny black folk with beaming faces. Anything the *Mama* wanted she must have, so one boy opened the tin of bully while another set the table and a third pranced forward with a loaf of the dry brownish bread made from the *malé* flour. It was one of the most satisfying meals I had ever eaten, and the spirit of friendliness which filled the hut was indescribable.

As I ate the old man talked to me of his children. Not for him was there any frantic business of convert-snatching. For over forty years he had lived and worked in this lonely place, labouring always to bring comfort to his people. He was priest, doctor, nurse, dispenser of justice, giver of advice,

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food and education. "They are wonderful," he said simply. "They have an innate humility of mind which makes me ashamed; but always one must remember they are children."

I was curious. "And you make them become Christians?"

"I *make* them do nothing at all. They have charity in their hearts, and my church stands open night and day so that they may grow to understand that it too is charitable."

For long he talked to me of the native mind, of native beliefs, of the hard lacquer of fear and cruelty that centuries of precarious living had laid over the essential kindness of the black man. Saintly and wise himself, he saw clearly all the problems which confronted his people, all the dangers which beckoned them. Many, many times during his long ministry he had been almost defeated by these things, but his charity had reached out to their charity—and had found it.

It was dusk before the lorry arrived, but I had lost count of time as I listened to the soft Provençal voice of this man who had sacrificed all worldly gain in order to help his fellow-men. The driver was given a meal, and a huge bowl of *malé* porridge was provided for Pencilo and our passengers. I slipped across to the church and put a little money into the alms box by the door. In the rough pews some twelve or fourteen of the women passengers were sitting feeding their babies. Before a shrine of the Madonna two men gazed fascinated. In the aisle a small group watched the flickering altar candles. Behind me the priest spoke: "They like the lights and the colours; but even more they like the peace."

Oh, yes, this tiny church was sanctuary.

He blessed me and wished me well on my journey. "And when you write your book remember that the black man is a child, wayward as are your own children in England, but dearly loved."

The driver rattled his gears. "Queer old bird, ought to live in Barmy Valley."

I didn't answer. I was thinking of the priest's life, over forty years of grinding poverty and hardship in a tropic land. Not one word had he said of the intense personal misery and discomfort he must have endured, but I knew vaguely what he must have suffered. "*But the greatest of these,*" I said aloud and suddenly, "*is Charity.*"

The driver stared at me. I'm sure he thought I, too, was a candidate for Barmy Valley.

## vi

Thanks to numerous displays of temperament on the part of the lorry we stayed the night at another rest-house, where I wished longingly I had accepted the *Mama*'s offer of the tin of inter-changeable beef. There were no lions, only a small and harmless green snake coiled lovingly round the ewer in my bedroom, and the driver was in such a bad temper that I knew distinct relief the next morning when he pointed to a swirl of dust ahead of us and grunted, "Kapiri Mposhi."

The next instant the dust enveloped us. It was red and stinging hot, and a harsh wind from the south blew it into thick clouds which looked like solid brick walls surging towards us about six feet off the ground. "Here's the post office," yelled the driver, and I groped my way out of the cab into an impenetrable red mass. Somebody pulled me by the hand and I heard the door bang behind me. Through an inch-deep layer of dust I peered out at a long room heaped with mail-bags. "Just a little storm," said the postmaster encouragingly.

I was morose. I said I wanted a bath, and where was the hotel, and when did the train for Ndola leave?

He and the driver did Kaffir clicks with their teeth, a most distressing habit. I must know that the *mails* had to be counted before such a minor item as a passenger won attention, and that it was only eleven o'clock

anyway, and that the Kaffir Mail train ran only on certain days and they didn't think for a moment this was one of them.

It was no use arguing with them. I shook myself until mounds of dust decorated the floor, sat down on a mail-bag and wrote a tempestuous epistle to my publishers telling them that Africa was the most revolting continent, that I was suffering the tortures of the damned, and that I could never write a book about a place where they charged you two pounds ten for a night's lodging, a green snake, and a variety of tinned foods. (Afterwards I tore the letter up. Altitude and dust had combined to whip my Scots blood into a positive fury.)

An hour later I sat on the hotel verandah sipping a long cool drink and feeling at peace with the world. The dust-storm had died, and Kapiri was revealed as a ribbon of white road bordered by houses with poinsettia-filled gardens. The hotel itself was a series of long huts, my bedroom was beautifully clean, my bath—save for the presence of three agile small lizards—had been delicious. I scanned the *Bulawayo Chronicle* and was happy. True, the lorry still stood in the yard, and the poor sheep still vainly strove to share the horse-hair sofa with the goat, but these things had ceased to worry me. Also, and with guile, I had left the oranges and the buck on top of the cab.

Peace did not last. Suddenly the driver appeared round the corner. "Come and have a drink?"

I said generously that he must drink with me and we perambulated across to the bar, a tiny hut to which entrance was possible only when the proprietor was available. (As he was an ardent gardener and spent most of his waking hours tending his lettuces and tomatoes down by the river, the population of Kapiri remained strictly sober.) At the moment, however, elegantly attired in a brown Jaeger dressing-gown, he was arguing with a very drunk Dutchman who wanted to buy a bottle of *dop*.

"We are not a public house. We are, indeed, almost a *boma*."

I was intrigued. I had met with several funny things in Africa, but I had never known a hotel to be a seat of Government.

"Man alive!" said the Dutchman. "I've got a wife and child outside in the car. We've got to make Kasama in two days and you know damn' well I can't get another drink before Mpika."

Remembering the rest-house at Mkushi I had sympathy with him; but the proprietor was adamant. "We have no off-licence—and if you don't get out of here double-quick I shall arrest you. We are the local J.P."

The whole thing was entrancing. It reminded me of Victoriana, and aspidistras, and ormolu clocks in glass cases. The Dutchman admitted defeat and shambled off to rejoin his thirsty family, while we drank *Tusker* beer and the proprietor told us horrific tales of the fearsome customers who haunted The Great North Road.

Presently I asked him about the Ndola train and he became most agitated. It was after midday and a Saturday, and although there really was a Kaffir Mail early the following morning it was necessary for me to be introduced to the station-master before I could be issued with a ticket. "He goes off for the week-end," he explained, "and you may be too late to catch him. Wait while I change and I'll take you across to the station."

I was beginning to like Kapiri. Any place wherein justice and whisky were dispensed with such magnificent impartiality and one had to be introduced to the station-master before being allowed to travel repaid study.

When the proprietor reappeared decorously garbed in grey we walked solemnly along a dusty track to the station. By the grace of heaven the stationmaster was still there and I was presented both to him and his assistant with much pomp. Did I know Berkshire? What had the

weather in England been like before I left? Would I mind expressing my views on the Royal Commission then visiting the Rhodesias? Twenty minutes of stilted conversation left me limp. I said, "How much is the second-class return to Ndola?"

The reaction to this question was stupendous. A kind of shudder ran through my three companions. Such sordid details, apparently, were better left undiscussed—and *second-class!*

They said in chorus, "A white lady must go first-class."

My Scots half was still in the ascendant. I remarked with some asperity that in every other country I had ever visited I had travelled third.

That shattered the assistant. "But you've been staying with. . . ." (Everyone you meet in Africa always knows your movements to the last hair.) "He's a rich man, although it's absurd the way he squanders money buying bags of cement for his natives. Of course, I heard the other day he hadn't had his money very long; is that so?"

I treasured that remark. The idea that the buying of cement stamped one as *nouveau riche* appealed to me—and I knew the *Bwana* would be enchanted with it.

Somehow a second-class ticket was made out and I pushed the necessary money rather furtively across the counter, feeling that I had offended all the canons of Kapiri by so doing.

Our parting handshakes were distinctly lacking in warmth. Back at the hotel I found the driver gazing sorrowfully into an empty glass. "These tins don't hold half so much as they do in Broken Hill."

I said, "Oh, my!" and stood him a second *Tusker*; then I ambled along to the dining-room.

There may be other hotels in Central Africa which provide as excellent food as they do in Kapiri—I didn't meet one. Thick, rich soup, crisply fried fish from the river, roan antelope as tender as chicken, a bewildering variety of

vegetables, golden home-made cheeses. Replete and somnolent I made for my bedroom, to be shortly awakened from glorious sleep by a fearful commotion outside. "Mrs. Bigland! Mrs. Bigland! You forgot your oranges and buck."

Damn!

Dragging myself out of bed I opened my door. In the distance was the retreating figure of the driver; on the step were the fruits of my recent journey. When freshly killed that buck had looked loathsome; now, smothered in flies, it looked perfectly awful. "Boy," I addressed the youth who looked after my hut. "Take all this away."

He beamed at me. "Yes, *Mama*."

I went back to bed. Kapiri was a grand place.

At four o'clock I drank a dish of tea with the proprietor on the verandah. "Afterwards I'll take you to see my gardens, and then—er—there are some people who would like to meet you."

Did a shadow cross the sun? I pulled myself together. All these folk were so kindly, and I an ungrateful creature. At that moment a pathetic figure cycled into the yard. Its face was wreathed in stubbly beard, its arms and legs streaked with dust, its shirt tattered and its shorts in ribbons. But it was a white man, and it begged for a little food.

"We are almost a *boma*," said the proprietor. "We are the J.P."

The figure wilted. "Honest, Mister, I'm going straight through to Cairo; I've come from Jo'burg."

"I know your sort," the proprietor's voice was stern. "Let me see your papers and your money."

I moved away, feeling embarrassed, and nearly collided with my house-boy. "Please, *Mama*, the cook has rubbed your meat with salt and put it in a sack. I will take it and the oranges to the station now."

"But they were meant for you."

He looked thoroughly shocked. "Oh, no, *Mama*, for you."

The proprietor was striding towards his office. "I'll get the necessary papers for you to sign," he called over his shoulder to the cyclist, who mopped his forehead and glanced imploringly at me. "I ain't a bum, Missis."

A brilliant idea struck me. "Bring the meat and the oranges here quickly," I told the boy.

He trotted off and the cyclist edged nearer. "Listen, Missis, I'm not staying to answer no questions from that old geezer. S'truth, I wish I'd never seen this blasted country."

I said hurriedly, "But I can give you some food."

"Oh, yeah? And the cops'll put me inside while I'm eating it. No thanks, I'm off!"

When the proprietor returned all that could be seen of his late visitor was a far cloud of dust. "I thought as much. They're a pest, these cadgers—chuck up every imaginable job and then beg their way out of the country. I'll telegraph Mpika and have him stopped there."

"Please don't. He's hungry and down and out and . . ." my voice trailed off. Anyone who had the temerity even to try to bicycle seven or eight thousand miles north through jungle, desert and swamp seemed worthy of encouragement.

"You'd never do for Africa," said the proprietor. "Too soft-hearted. Why that sort of parasite . . ." His gaze fell on the large sack the boy had just deposited at my feet. "Here, boy, put the *Mama*'s meat and fruit in the ice-box and *don't forget* to take it with her baggage in the morning."

I gave it up. For the rest of my life, I thought, that sack would follow me round.

We walked down to the gardens and admired the cattle kraals, and came back to find the *haute noblesse* of Kapiri gathered on the steps of the bar. They were very kind, very courteous, very curious as to my function in life. They wanted to know what I thought of the *Anschluss*, and what Paris hats were like this summer, and if I'd seen the Coronation, and if I knew of a cheap farm in Devon where one

might holiday. The only thing they didn't want to know was my reaction to tropical Africa—that was a subject which left them quite cold. Eventually, however, they began to discuss local scandals and I hid myself behind a can of *Tusker* and conversed with a fine old man who had been through the Matabele rebellions.

I said, "Tell me about Cecil Rhodes."

"*Mr. Rhodes*," he corrected gently. "I was at school with Mr. Rhodes in England and had the honour to serve under him until his death. Step across to my house and I will show you my photographs."

They were wonderful photographs, but they were not for the squeamish. In the early days there had been lynchings—Rhodes made short work of people who created trouble—and old and faded though these snapshots were they told with ghastly clarity of the rough justice meted out to natives who offended against the white man's strict code. I looked at my host. He was benign, beloved by his servants, and his short-sighted grey eyes regarded one very straightly. "You saw these lynchings?"

"I helped in them," he amended. "We had a man's country in those days—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

I wandered round his sitting-room. There were photographs of Rhodes as a boy, Rhodes as a young man, Rhodes at the very pinnacle of his fame, the man who made a country for men.

"Thank God," said my host, "he died before he knew of the hash we were going to make of his work. Look at us now, nearly forty years after his death still groping and muddling. Look at that suburban echo they call the capital—Lusaka—and the little fellows who dress for dinner each night, and give tennis and sundowner parties each afternoon, and kick their servants from here to kingdom come if they lose a collar-stud. Look at the damn'-fool treaties we've made, and the concessions we've granted, and

the arguments we have about amalgamation between Central African territories. And then look back on Mr. Rhodes's vision of a United States of Africa, a vast, solid British possession stretching from the Sudan to Capetown. We've lost that vision through our own damn' foolishness: we'll never get it back. I know the scandals, the *canard* about Mr. Rhodes; I know the stories of his ruthlessness; I know that since his death we've footled away with Africa like a lot of babies playing with sand."

Opposite me on the wall was a photograph of the grave at Matoppo, and the old man sighed as he saw me glance at it. "A grand resting-place for him; but to my mind he and David Livingstone should lie together. Ah, they were as different as chalk from cheese, but they were the only two men who brought life to Rhodesia."

From the door an agitated voice asked when I was returning to the sundowner party. I opened my mouth to say "never", remembered it was being held in my honour, and capitulated.

"If you care to come back after dinner," said my host, "I'll be happy to tell you of Mr. Rhodes."

I thanked him and trailed along to the hotel to be greeted by a lady who insisted I should go to her house and have a bath. "I know there were lizards in the one you had here this morning," she whispered. I jumped. The way the most intimate details of existence became common knowledge in Africa never ceased to astonish me. But I could not refuse her invitation. Tea and baths were the very essence of Rhodesian hospitality, so I trotted obediently to a poinsettia-surrounded home and stood a trifle foolishly in a large bedroom while two boys panted along with enormous fish-kettles full of boiling water which they decanted into a wooden tub. My hostess sat down in an easy chair. "Now we can have a nice chat," she said contentedly.

I had swum in the nude with the entire population of a

Russian town and I had been washed by the Bemba in the enchanted pool, but I had never sat hunched up in a wooden tub and performed my ablutions before a complete stranger who kept up a running commentary on aids to beauty, child welfare, divorce and clothes, and I found it a devastating experience. Parboiled and agonised I tried to soap my ears and return suitable answers at the same time, and failed lamentably. "We'll leave the water," remarked the lady brightly as I muffled my confused but clean body in a towel. "*It will do for my husband.*"

Water was a precious commodity in Kapiri, but somehow I felt unable to meet the poor gentleman who was shortly to wallow in my tub. Throwing on my garments I muttered apologies for my haste—I had urgent letters to write—and skulked back to the hotel.

"Look here," said somebody, "didn't you say you were going to stay with . . .?"

"Yes."

About half a dozen people shook their heads lugubriously. "He's terribly shy and he simply hates guests. Besides, he has a most *important* person staying with him at the moment."

"But he asked me to stay."

They regarded me pityingly, their glances inferring that the wretched man had only done so in a moment of mental aberration he had regretted ever since. They elaborated the theme of his important guest, who seemed to be the uncrowned king of the Rhodesias, and they went on to describe life in the Copper Belt after the manner of a sophisticated Londoner explaining the habits of Mayfair to a provincial hick.

My spirits sank lower and lower, and all my fears of Mufulira returned. Why had I ever left paradise? Almost I wished I had stolen a *jinga* and pedalled northwards with the poor cyclist. Aloud I remarked that rather than upset my prospective host I should go back to the old Provençal Father and ask him if I might stay in his guest-hut.

"But your schedule?"

As ever, that word defeated me. I stalked into dinner in a vile temper, and not even three hours of conversation with my old friend about Mr. Rhodes restored my peace. The proprietor bade me a kindly farewell. "The boy will bring you tea and a packet of sandwiches at 2.45 a.m. and take you across to the station."

A queer land, Northern Rhodesia, full of the strangest mixture of people and things. Great leaders and suburban-minded grumblers; saints and men of little faith; old warriors like Mulemfwe and Bamucapi in striped shirts; lion and snakes and lorries and endless bowls of *malé* porridge and trains that left at three in the morning. I picked a lizard from my counterpane, searched for its mate and found it under the pillow, popped the little dears outside the door and climbed into bed.

But my last waking thought was, "What on earth am I going to do with that buck?"

## CHAPTER VII

### IN AND UNDER THE COPPER BELT

#### I

At three in the morning Kapiri Mposhi was colder than any place in the Tropics has any right to be, and I shuffled miserably through the sand after the house-boy who, with the perversity of his kind, refused to wear the nice thick overcoat bought him by his master and was clad in that gentleman's cast-off Jaeger dressing-gown which was literally falling to bits. Ourselves, the luggage and our lantern seemed to be the only things on the deserted station. I tried a vain and final plea. "Take that sack of food home with you." Basely I added a shilling as bribe.

"No, *Mama*. The *Bwana* said it was to go in the train with you."

In a tribe not renowned for truthfulness his honesty was incredible.

The train crawled into sight. It was immensely long and seemed mainly composed of goods trucks, but after a good quarter mile's gallop down the line we reached a passenger coach where a shivering guard in a British Warm hauled me on board.

"She has this sack, too," said the boy simply. I could have murdered him.

We walked through the natives' carriage, very similar to the long coaches with slatted wood bunks one finds on Russian trains but with a smell ten thousand times more arresting, to the second-class compartments which were dusty, stuffy and covered with threadbare tapestry. "We don't reach Ndola till after ten," said the guard. "I should have a sleep."

But I had a busy time ahead. I really could not face the uncrowned king of the Rhodesias with that buck. Covertly I opened the sack and recoiled promptly. Smells Russian, Egyptian and African were sweet scents compared to the stench which assailed my nostrils, and for some absurd reason I thought of the mask recently achieved from the A.R.P., and now hanging useless in a cupboard in England. Still, something had to be done, so I hauled forth a selection of squashed oranges to which adhered a distressing mixture of flies and salt. Then I opened the window, seized the joint of buck, and leaned out. From the next window, to my horror, leaned the guard!

Within the next three hours that man must have developed dark thoughts as to my sanity, for the wretched creature spent his entire time gazing out at the bush and every few minutes I would poke my head out too, glare at him and retreat hastily, while at the lonely stations where the train stopped I hurled bad oranges with much violence at the piccanins who danced on the platform chanting, "Penny, *Mama*. Two pennies, *Mama*!"

The piccanins didn't think highly of my gifts. Indeed, they shrilled their opinion of them in no uncertain manner and about six o'clock the guard entered my compartment. "You won't mind my saying so, but it's very wrong policy to give these children presents."

I kicked the atrocious sack under the seat with my foot and felt like Trunk Murderer Number One. Never before had I realised the complete horror of trying to get rid of a corpse. "They like oranges," I said inanely, "I don't."

There was a thoughtful look in the guard's eye. I became definitely hysterical. The aroma of dead buck filled the compartment. At any moment this awful man might arrest me, and how could I prove that the gory mess in the sack was not part-evidence of a grisly crime?

He sat down and drew out a cigarette-case. "Will you smoke?"

(Very evidently keeping a suspicious character under observation.)

We smoked. He told me the history of Rhodesian Railways, and how a guard here was very different from a guard in Europe, and what he thought of the natives. He described the Copper Belt and how the mines stretched from Ndola along the Congo border, and how many tons of copper each produced every year. By the time the train slowed down again I was almost a mental case. "There's an Englishman on the train. I'll ask him to come along and see you. He lives at Ndola."

That was the last straw. "I . . . I think I'll sleep for a while."

He regarded me in amaze. "But you said . . ."

Something snapped. "Surely I can change my mind?"

He withdrew, looking a little hurt. I felt sure he had locked me in with the corpse, tried the door, slid it open and faced him again. Oh, well, if he was in the corridor I'd have another shot at dumping the sack out of the window. Just as I was grovelling under the seat a voice said behind me, "Good morning. Can I help you?"

It was, of course, the Englishman who lived at Ndola. He was a nice man, and he had a soap-factory and a baby of three months old and he had just been down to Bulawayo on business, and what did I think of the country? I didn't think anything; my mind revolved around buck and I felt acutely conscious of the fact that white women are not usually discovered flat on their stomachs on the floors of Rhodesian trains. Besides, I wasn't at all sure how much the guard had told him of my queer habits. He sniffed dubiously, "There's an appalling smell in here; they ought to move you to another compartment."

"Oh, no. I mean, I like it, at least, I was just going to have a sleep."

My reputation in Northern Rhodesia was growing—

albeit in the wrong direction. He stared at me, said he hoped he would see me again before Ndola, and disappeared.

I breathed again. Heaving the sack to the window I looked out only to find half Africa gazing with interest at my movements. This was frightful! The train jolted on, and on six separate occasions I squinted out to meet the reproachful eyes of either the guard or the soap-maker. Maybe they thought I was suicidal; but Ndola was growing nearer and I was growing desperate. Wrapping the sack as tightly round its disgusting burden as I could I lay flat once more and shoved it beneath a complicated system of piping under the seat; then I quaked along the corridor to discover that water on Rhodesian trains is an unheard-of luxury, so that a vain attempt to rid my face and hands of mingled traces of buck and dust cost me a seven and sixpenny bottle of astringent face-lotion.

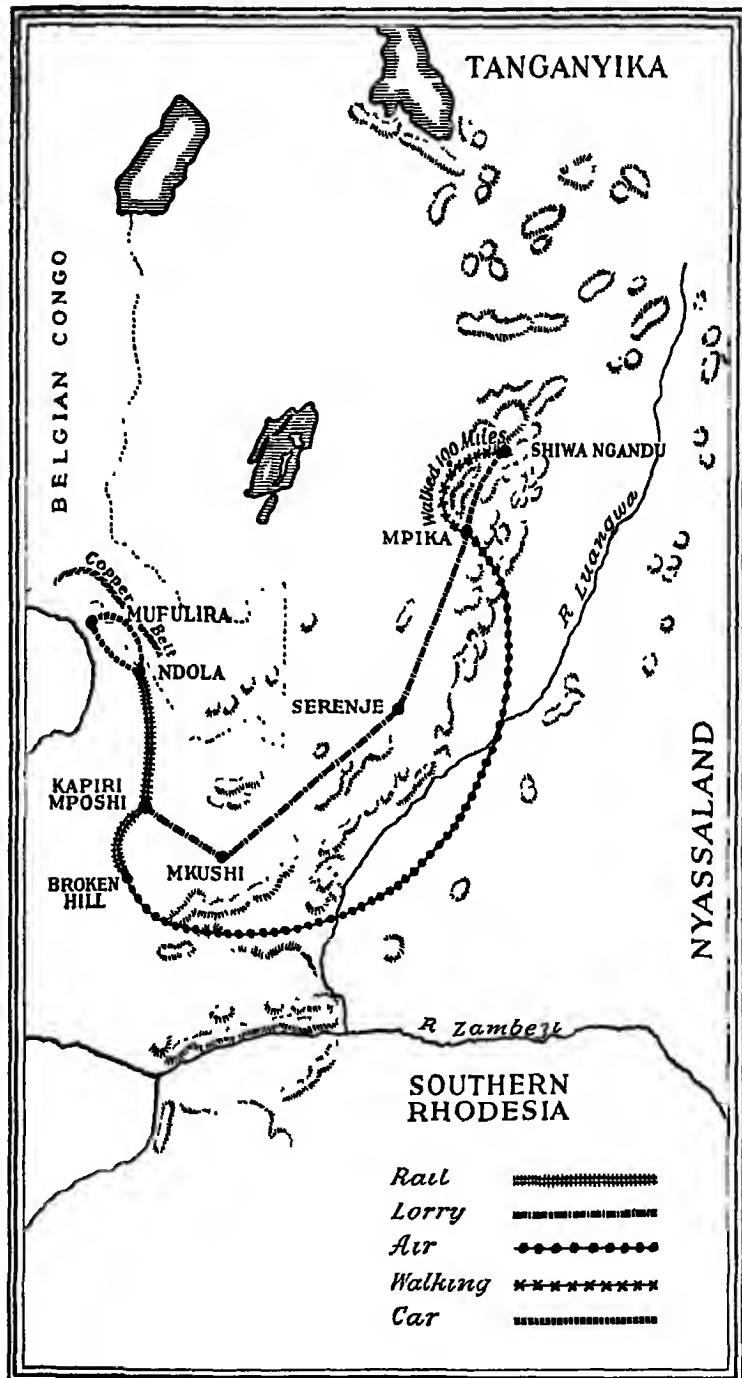
I was still in a state of panic. The body, so to speak, was yet with me—and Ndola two hours away. Nervously I perched on the edge of the seat and wondered what punishments Lusaka inflicted upon murderesses. In came the soap-maker again. "You didn't have much rest?"

He little knew. "Oh, er, there's so much to see."

He was a kindly man. He didn't say that a good view of Africa was unobtainable from my recent position; he merely offered to show me Bwana M'kuba when we stopped at it. "There never was any copper, I don't think, except alluvial scrapings, but over a million and three-quarters was poured into the place."

I had uncomfortable memories of shares and of enthusiastic talk of this wonder-mine which was going to bring riches to thousands, and as we ground to a standstill in a desolate station I forgot about murder and knew only I was looking at the most tragic town in Africa.

Only a few years ago the world came to Bwana M'kuba and the word "copper" spelt magic. Americans, Englishmen, Italians, Frenchmen, Germans, Belgians and Portuguese





descended like locusts on the bush, cleared it, fired it, built houses and shops, made boulevards. Overnight, almost, a city sprang up, a grand and glittering place where cinemas jostled *chic* small shops, and a Parisian hair-dresser advertised permanent waves, and motor-cars tore up and down the streets. Money, money, money—to be had for the asking out of the big mine beside the town. And where there was money there was work, so the news spread far and wide, and the drums beat it through the bush, and the half-starved tribesmen journeyed four, five hundred, a thousand miles to this city of enchantment where life was going to be so wonderful. They were terrified of the mine because the powers of darkness lurked there, yet their need drove them into it in shoals and the white man, sensing their despair and knowing he must have labour, put them literally in blinkers. After that the African lost some of his terror and found the delights of civilisation; for the Indian traders came and opened stores where bright-coloured cloths, cheap scented soap and virulent spirits were sold, and the African spent wages he had never dreamed of earning before and knew himself to be a fine, swaggering fellow, the equal of anyone on the face of the earth.

Back in Europe and the States trusting investors bought Bwana M'kuba shares and wagged their heads over their acumen, and engineers sniffed success and pawned their boots to buy their passages to Beira. None of these people knew, of course, that the proper name for Bwana M'kuba was "Heartbreak City."

Bwana M'kuba itself ought to have known. There had been so many other mines of gold, silver and tin that had proved abortive propositions. But Bwana M'kuba was on the crest of the wave; their mine was different. The city grew, became a fantastic, incredible place where men spent money like water and told each other fairy tales of Eldorado, and down in the compounds young natives coughed their

lives away, and up in the bazaars the Indians counted their profits.

After all that, there was no copper, a fact Bwana M'kuba at first refused to believe. The value of the shares dropped sharply, and half the world away disillusioned holders listened to rumour and cut their losses. Gradually unease crept over their town. Motor-cars disappeared, the *chic* little shops put up their shutters, the fine white houses were abandoned, the Indians packed their traps and scattered for dear life. Only the Africans remained, for they were simple people and held implicit faith in the word of the white man. Besides, they had become inured to blinkers—and to other less innocuous adjuncts to civilisation. Panic seized them when they found themselves out of work. The majority of them were far from home and had neither money nor strength for the long journey. Some fled, some marched to Luanshya (Roan Antelope), to Nkana, or to Mufulira and found employment, some drifted down to Broken Hill.

As swiftly as it had come the glory of Bwana M'kuba departed and the bush, as though in revenge for the ill-treatment man had accorded it, took silent possession of the place once more. Now, some seven years afterwards, I looked at it and saw nothing save the brown hump which marked where the mine had been and one solitary house.

“We'll stay here half an hour,” said the soap-maker. “Would you care for a walk round?”

We left the station and the bush fairly hit us in the eye. All that was left of the miraculous streets was a sandy track dotted with scrub. Beside it lay cracked stucco pillars, heaps of bricks from which grasses sprouted, twisted girders and lumps of coal. Further on there were more pathetic remnants; a child's bicycle, rusted and tyreless, several derelict cars, pots and pans, flat-irons, a bread-bin and a pile of calabashes. Only by these things could one tell that human beings had lived here, but the soap-maker

led me round several corners and we came upon a row of houses, roofless and with crumbling walls tangled in yellow creeper. A grass-snake swished across a broken doorway and tiny lizards darted to and fro in the sunshine; a honey-bird squawked in the trees and a mongoose poked an inquiring head from the undergrowth; over everything lay a queer pall of sadness.

I remembered the Nile deserts and the ceaseless work necessary to keep the river-lands fertile, and how I had felt awed by realisation of Africa's dark strength. Here I was not awed but frankly terrified, for the ruins of Bwana M'kuba showed to the full the cruel, relentless force by which she ruled man. A million and three-quarters, human sacrifice and degradation—what did she care for such things? She simply waited until man had beaten himself stupid against her deep breast and then stretched out her arms to destroy all he had made. In spite of the brilliant morning sun I felt very cold and not a little sick.

As we walked back to the station a sense of blood-guilt attacked me again. What if the guard had discovered the sack? Fortunately he had been imbibing tea in the station-master's house and greeted us heartily.

"Not long to go now. You'll like Ndola, it's a grand town, electricity, main drainage, everything."

I wasn't particularly interested. I preferred paradise, where the plugs in the baths struck work at odd intervals, and either the hot tap wouldn't stop running or the cold one wouldn't start.

The guard went on, "Shall I help you get your baggage together?"

Perish the thought! I dived into my compartment and settled myself firmly on the seat. If he mentioned the sack I should scream. At Ndola I was being met by a friend of the *Bwana's* and I refused to contemplate his reactions to a strange woman with a corpse. The soap-maker joined me, showed me snapshots of his infant and pointed out the

amenities of Ndola as we neared the town. I blinked. It was the first place of any size I had seen since Nairobi and it quite fazed me. Masses of white and red houses clustered on a hillside, factories and works of various kinds strewed the valley, cars whizzed along wide roads—*real* roads!—oleanders, bougainvillea and flame-trees rioted.

“If you get out I’ll hand your luggage through the window,” said the soap-maker. “How many pieces have you?”

I drew a long breath and hoped the guard was nowhere near. “Just the hat-box and the typewriter,” I answered casually and fled.

On the platform a tall man greeted me. “You’re spending the day with us and then I’m sending you out to Mufulira under police protection.”

I nearly had a heart attack. To worry over murder for hours and then to be told you are under surveillance produces a ghastly sensation in your inside.

“Where’s your baggage?”

I gulped, and pointed to it. Heaven send the train moved on before my secret was discovered. The tall man roared with laughter. “My God, I’ve never met a woman who travelled as light as that. Come on, we must go home and tell my wife.”

I didn’t like to tell him that my regrettable liking for knocking round the world with one suitcase had already lost me countless women friends and broken up more happy homes than I cared to remember, but as we drove up the hill in the car I said tentatively, “What’s all this about police?”

“Oh, the Chief’s going out to Mufulira and has offered to give you a lift.”

Extraordinary how much brighter the sun shone on Ndola after that remark.

The entire household turned out to admire the *Mama’s* luggage while I wallowed in a bath and reflected for the

hundredth time on the hospitality of folk in Central Africa. They welcomed a complete stranger with all the warmth reserved for bosom friends in other countries, they provided baths, meals, drinks, beds and cars at any hour of the day or night, they treated one, indeed, like a new-born babe. Refreshed, changed and with the last sniff of buck relegated to Ndola's superb main drain I felt infinitely better. The only snag was that once more the shyness of my prospective host formed the principal topic of conversation, and by the time the policeman arrived for lunch I was in a state of dither. Then the telephone rang (I nearly said, "Oh, my!" when I heard the bell, being unaccustomed to such luxuries.) It was the shy one, inquiring delicately what I was like. "Quite harmless," they said, "we like her."

It was kind of them, but it didn't lessen my inferiority complex.

The policeman, a *capitao* and myself set forth in the middle of a blazing afternoon, for on the Copper Belt it was a great deal hotter than on the North-eastern plateau. The policeman was delightful—indeed, if it hadn't been for his moral support during that forty or fifty mile drive to Mufulira I verily believe I should have turned back to Ndola. The road skirted the Congo border and as I stared at forest after forest my classically stupid brain began to wonder where the copper mines were.

"Oh, we tuck 'em away," said the policeman and did a frantic swerve to avoid a wild-cat. "Now we actually go through the Congo for some miles, but the Belgians don't bother us for passes."

I sat up. The Congo was really thrilling. Unfortunately, it looked exactly like Northern Rhodesia, but I hugged the illusion of darkest Africa to my heart and felt pleasantly intrigued. (A curious and devastating fact was that since my arrival in Africa I had developed all the more pernicious instincts of the globe-trotter. I think myself that frightful

word "schedule" was to blame, but maybe the altitude had something to do with it as well.)

The policeman cursed the road. I gaped at him. "But it's a billiard table compared to The Great North Road."

"And The Great North Road," he answered gravely, "is heaven compared to The Great East Road."

An hour later we came to a place which rather resembled Welwyn Garden City. "Mufulira," said the policeman.

I stared, and stared. I don't quite know what I expected a big mining-camp to look like, but in my mind were hazy notions of tin huts, smoke-stacks, donkey-engines and a whole lot of desolation. There was nothing in the least desolate about Mufulira. Trim avenues bordered with short-clipped grass and flowering trees and shrubs stretched in every direction. The houses were low white bungalows with neat, well-tended gardens and most had large cars parked outside them. The whole thing was bewildering, and I told the policeman he had somehow transported me from the Copper Belt to the Home Counties.

"You wait a bit," he grinned, and swung the car into a drive. As he delved in the back seat for our gear he added, "Good Lord, did you leave your baggage in the train?"

My heart went plop. I'd known all the time I couldn't get away with that atrocious sack! But it was only the paucity of my travelling equipment again. I was so relieved I beamed upon a man who appeared on the house steps. "Come right in," he said. "I'm not so shy as they say."

On the instant I changed my ideas of Mufulira. I was glad I had come.

## II

Sunday evening was *fiesta* time in the huge camp. From the Garden City houses issued young men in flannels, young women in immaculate tennis-kit. Beside the first

tee on the golf-course players bridled at each other and insisted their ball had been put down first. On the football pitch, surrounded by a cheering crowd who yelled, "Feet, Mufulira, feet!" the local team played that of the Roan mine. In the Club, an enormous palace containing a cinema, a dance-room, a library, hair-dressing saloons and a vast quantity of chromium-plated furniture, elegant girls in flowered chiffon frocks sat sipping cocktails. It was all very pretty, but it wasn't Africa. The only natives I saw were servants, and every moment the illusion of a model suburb grew.

My host smiled. "I'll drive you round the compounds."

Within five minutes we had left the boulevards and were driving between lines of red brick huts over the hard-baked mud of an enormous compound where fat babies rolled and played. By their doorways women squatted in the sun, laughing and chatting with their neighbours, tending their fires, occasionally stirring the messes of grain they were cooking. All of them were dressed with a sophistication unknown farther north—hats with feathers adorned their woolly heads, cheap silk frocks in gay colourings or jumpers and skirts their bodies, European shoes with pointed toes encased their feet. Yet still they crouched by their fires, let their children romp naked in the dust, kept to the habits of their race. In a wide space beneath some trees the men were gathered in a great circle, tall bearded Zulus, men from Barotseland, lithe small Bemba, wiry Angoni, men drawn from many different tribes. Their attention was fixed on a most astonishing collection of their fellows who were dancing solemnly to music supplied by an equally astonishing band. The dancers wore dark trousers, hilariously striped and checked shirts, bow ties and billycock hats—a travesty of European dress which was at variance with the shufflings of their bare feet, the wrigglings of their bodies, the ceaseless chant which came from their open mouths. They all carried canes and twirled these

valiantly as they advanced and retreated, bowed and jerked upright.

I gazed at them fascinated; then turned my attention to the band. There were trombonists, trumpet-blowers, accordion-players, drummers and native piano-players, and their faces glistened as they blew and thrummed and thumped on their instruments, filling the air with a weird jangle of sound under which was clearly discernible the tune of *It's June in January*. The whole scene was the most incredible mixture of Europe and Africa.

A Zulu strode over to the car and saluted. He liked "the jazz" and hoped that we did, too. Much better, he averred, than the native dances. He did not realise that his own countrymen in the United States had given the western races the basis of modern syncopated dance-music, or that the shimmy-shake, the charleston and the fox-trot had their origin in African dances. All that had happened was that the wheel had come full-circle and that his folk were now performing an attenuated version of the dances their ancestors had invented centuries ago in the bush.

I watched the grinning, miming figures, the ridiculous Charlie Chaplin lift of their absurd hats, the swagger of the canes, the mincing steps. "The jazz" perhaps, yet Africa still dominated it, from the throb of the drums to the crab-like swaying of their bodies.

As we drove slowly on I remembered something. "But where is the mine?"

How they hid the reason behind Mufulira as well as they did I have never been able to determine. Many times after my first visit to that mine I searched for it in vain, yet its surface buildings covered a remarkably large space, its head-gear reared some 180 feet above the ground, its whitish smoke belched high out of the smelter. As the policeman said, they kept their mines tucked away in this part of the world.

On that first visit it was growing dusk when we reached the smelter, and its ruddy glow filled the dark sky. On crazy

platforms built all round its gaping scarlet mouth black figures skipped to and fro their dark bodies, naked to the waist, shining bronze in the savage light, while above them huge skips swung endlessly, tipping avalanches of copper-matte into the furnace. I watched from below, heedless of the fierce heat, entranced yet repelled. There was something sinister in the sight of these black men tending this monster fashioned by civilisation, something far more terrifying than could be seen in any country where white people looked after the machinery they had invented. I felt that the natives required more than blinkers; they needed suits of armour complete with visors.

Oh, I knew the other side of the medal. I knew how carefully these workers were looked after, how they drew large wages and received free rations not only for themselves but for their families, how they had special clothes, special showerbaths, special doctors who made daily inspections, special everything. I knew, too, that without the copper mines there would be no work for the Bemba and other tribes, no revenue with which to improve medical, educational and agricultural conditions throughout the territory, no hope for the native who wished to better himself and find security.

But at the bottom of my heart I thought of just one thing —leading apes through hell.

We went to see the molten copper being poured out into trays, hardened off, smoothed over, sent careering down long chutes towards men who dexterously levered the hot blocks of metal on to trolleys. We walked through the sheds which housed the changing and wash-rooms. We sidled carefully up and down ladders and along platforms in the building where the dynamos throbbed, and the floor shook beneath us, and the walls were plastered with "don't touch" notices and instructions as to what to do in case of anybody being electrocuted. We inspected the offices and studied fascinating models of the mine which showed where

were the layers of copper and where the treacherous dolomite rock. We pottered in the laboratories and handled the greenish lumps of ore, we peered at the dripping wet cage which was just about to descend the shaft, and we looked at enormous machines with jagged teeth that pounded the rocks into smallish pieces.

But always the smelter lured me back, and every few minutes I would slink round the corner and stare at it again.

"You can't stay here all night," they said, and whisked me off at last to the Club where I sat dazedly under the brilliant electric light among a hundred odd gay, chattering people and sipped a dry Martini. Everyone was very kind. What did I think of the tennis-courts? Had I seen the new blue-tiled swimming pool at Nkana? Did I know you could buy the nattiest little frocks at Madame Somebody's in Ndola?

I said, "Yes," "No," "Yes," "No," like a parrot, and thought fiercely of the possible reactions of the African to the mine. They doubtless thought me dumb, but politely persisted in their hospitable efforts. Suddenly a woman came up to me. "We know it's all wrong to arrange it without asking you first, but we're sure you won't mind. We've put you down to lecture on Soviet Russia at our Women's Institute Meeting to-morrow afternoon."

I regarded her blankly. Her speech was too much for my bemused brain. Apes in hell—and the Women's Institute!

### III

In Mufulira they didn't talk about the line or the altitude; they talked about the "shut-down." Everything dated from that terrible time during the slump in base-metal prices when the mines were forced to carry on with a purely skeleton staff, but to a stranger this constant mention of so many years before the "shut-down" or so many years after it was bewildering at first, although soon

I realised with a certain sense of shame that these men who talked so amusingly about life in the camp had endured a very great deal during that grisly period when wages were torn to ribbons, and unemployment stood shadow-like in the near background, and the fear of ugly riots became a menace. The women taught me a lot, too. I laughed at their conventionality, their social habits, their small jealousies; but I hadn't had to live and rear a family in Mufulira. Outwardly, now that the mine was working at full pressure, existence seemed easy and secure; underneath it was honeycombed by problems, none of them inconsiderable. There was malaria and there was blackwater and there was always the dread of yellow fever. Housekeeping was a nightmare job, because most of the food came in tins owing to the fact that the sulphide fumes withered the surrounding bush and made the keeping of cattle an impossibility, even if the tsetse fly difficulty could have been surmounted. With young children life became more complicated still. European nannies were about as scarce as ice in the Sahara—and about as expensive. Little creatures went down like pricked balloons if they developed any illness, and required a trip to the coast—an interminable and most costly journey—before they picked up again. A host of other anxieties also leered at the European mother. She couldn't leave her children in charge of native servants, she never knew what attempts at petty pilfering would be thought up next by her kitchen staff, she had to be on constant guard against such varied horrors as jiggers, black perils and possible riots.

No, life in Mufulira wasn't nearly as pleasant as it appeared, and I developed a very definite admiration for these folk who strove their mightiest to behave as though they were in truth in a Garden City; but I quailed before their very nice desire to entertain me. With my abominable habit of going native in whatever country I was in I had so sunk myself in paradise that I couldn't acclimatise

myself to eleven o'clock tea-parties, social hours at the Club, elaborate dinners and harmless gossip, and I felt more than a little like a bull in a china shop while in my mind was a sneaking suspicion that I, too, if I stayed in the place long enough, would say vaguely, "The natives? Oh, well, they're just the natives," and develop fears that the Bemba butler had designs on my daughter or myself.

So I would sneak home from bun-fights to talk to Peter, the head house-boy, and to watch his grave-old face light up when I mentioned the Kasakalabwe road and the Manshia river and the days when Chitimukulu had roamed from the Congo to the plateau. He was happy, he assured me; he had a fine master, good wages, splendid food (he also had several wives in the compound, I believe, but they were small beer and he never talked of them); yet he yearned for the nomad life of the bush and the stuffy *male* porridge and the dangers and poverty surrounding the men of his tribe. More than anything, I think, he missed the clan spirit so strong in his tribe; but he had gone too far towards the white man's ways, learnt too much of the world ever to go home and live in peace. He admitted that himself, but he sighed as he spoke.

Peter was the best butler I had ever met, white, black or yellow. No sooner did I put my nose inside the door than he bustled off to return staggering under an enormous silver tea-tray. While I made pretence at a meal (for he was very touchy if I didn't sample everything set before me) he hovered by my chair suggesting every other sustenance he could think of from gin to ice-cream. He removed my dusty shoes, ran me hot baths, kept my perpetually untidy bedroom like a new pin, placed a vase of fresh roses on my dressing-table at least twice a day. Indeed, when I told my host that I considered he had brought hospitality to a fine art by putting a copy of *Cold Comfort Farm*, which I had long wanted to read beside my bed, he answered that the book had been Peter's choice.

The Mufulira ladies had qualms about me. They were willing to concede that as a writer I was entitled to "queerness", but surely my oddity should not include this passion for talking to and hearing about black people or staying unchaperoned in a male household? For myself I had forgotten my unease about my visit to the Copper Belt and was enjoying myself immensely. American by birth, both my host and his other guest had mined in many parts of the world, and what particularly intrigued me about them was that Mufulira was already growing too big, too established for them. "She's a child and I've watched her grow up," said my host. "But now she's a *débutante* daughter I'm losing interest in her. I want another baby to look after." Easy living held no attractions for him. In another year he would be off to Patagonia, to the Persian desert, to Turkestan—any place that offered the prospect of a new mine with its attendant struggles.

Meantime he worked harder than most people. Responsible for the mine and for the well-being of every creature in the camp he brought to his job not only marvellous efficiency but a very real humanity. Not for him the usual tolerant attitude of the white man towards the black: he had the most intimate knowledge of his native workers and was tireless in his efforts to tend them, and as I watched him and listened to him I wished to peace that there were more men like him in Tropical Africa.

There were, alas, mighty few. So many never understood the native mentality or viewpoint, although they conscientiously did their level best at their jobs. Others frankly had no use for the native except as a unit of cheap labour, and among the lower grades of white workers—who drew remarkably high wages—there stalked the most dangerous spectre in African industry, the innate fear that some day and somehow the black man would snatch their position. Men of small education themselves, they did not pause to reason out that many, many years must elapse before such

an idea came to fruition, or that it was up to them so to advance in their trade that the native had no prospect of catching them up. No, they were afraid, and therefore they downed the native at every turn with commands, curses and kicks.

And the black man knew the cause behind the kicks.

Curiously enough, when you considered the history of Belgian administration in the Congo, the *Union Minière du Haut Katanga* and the *Forminière Concession* across the border provided better treatment for their natives than did the Rhodesian mines. The Belgian system of bringing whole clans of tribesmen to live in the vicinity of the mines ensured a constant supply of workers who were trained from boyhood, and their all-important medical services, from welfare clinics to hospitals, were better run.

They had not, however, to cope with so many difficulties as had the Rhodesian mines where, with the best will in the world, the companies could not control various of the labour problems with which they were confronted, and I mention the Belgian mines not with any idea of comparing their administration with that of Mufulira, Roan and Nkana, but simply because there is still a vague idea prevalent in England that the Congo is a land of "atrocities."

In the Rhodesian mines labour was recruited mainly from the North-eastern area. Having heard stupendous tales of wealth a man would trek south through the bush with the idea firmly fixed in his head that within a year at most he would be rolling home, a capitalist and happy, to his family. Occasionally he was fortunate enough to receive a free lorry pass or a substantial reduction in fares from Government or Company, but usually he walked, with the result that he arrived at the mines physically worn out and probably half-starved. Sometimes he settled down to his strange new work; sometimes he was so terrified at sight of the yawning shaft leading to what he was certain was the home of the *fiwa* that he turned tail and fled only to find

himself destitute in an unknown country. If he stayed at the mine he grew weary of the monotony, of the rigid inspections and regularity of hours, of association with alien tribesmen with whom he had nothing in common. The whole business was foreign to him and his mind could not assimilate civilisation.

I saw so many of these men. Their faces bore the blank, hurt look of a child disappointed in its first visit to the pantomime, and they moved apathetically about their tasks. Hundreds of their fellows were contented, I do not deny that for an instant, but as I wandered through the compounds I felt a curious atmosphere of unease which I attributed to detribalisation. At home these men had lived either under a chief or a headman who owed allegiance to the paramount chief of the district. They had been hedged about by strict tribal law, by tribal ceremonies, by tribal religion, and rough and poor though their lives had been these things had always been there, a solid familiar background on which they could lean.

At the mines there was no background.

There were a bewildering number of Christian sects, eight in all. There was a fine native hospital where first-class surgeons, doctors and nurses attended to their ailments. There were plentiful rations of food, including that great delicacy, meat. There were beer gardens, cinemas, games. But according to the native mind there was no *method* to life. Nobody inquired whether your wife really was your wife or not. Nobody minded when an evil man from another tribe desecrated your fire by cooking his food over it. Nobody cared if the hundred and one taboos so necessary to your well-being were neglected.

Unless you were an exceptionally strong man this detribalisation got you down. All round you were things which offended you; ahead of you was always the mine, home of all evil. So you either pretended you didn't mind and tried to ape the less reputable habits of the white man, or

you bought the innocuous beer sold in the garden, smuggled some sugar into it and stirred the mixture with a red hot iron stave, thus making a veritable "fire-water" which inflamed your brain and, eventually, riddled your body with disease.

A cheerful Sister gave me the case books of the hospital to go through. They appalled me. On the pages devoted to women and children I read "syphilis," "syphilis," "gonorrhoea," "syphilis" . . . .

"We lose so many in childbirth," she said. "They won't come in until the last minute and then it is too late."

"But isn't there a pre-natal clinic?"

"Oh, yes, but most of them are frightened and won't attend it. We have native probationers who go the round of the huts ever so often, but it is most difficult to get the women to submit to examination."

I understood that. You came from the bush where you obeyed all the rites explained to you at your *cisunga* ceremony to a place where people stood you in a white-tiled room full of cases containing terrible, glittering instruments, and laid unpurified hands on your body. Oh, no, a thousand times, no! Far better to let disease eat into you and your unborn child, and die dumbly.

Yet it wasn't the white man's fault. He had not brought venereal disease to Africa; it had been fairly common among the tribes centuries before his advent. All he had done was to try to apply modern medical methods to a race who were old when his ancestors were painting themselves with woad, and despite his efforts the scourge had been increased a hundredfold.

I said to people at the hospital, "But is it impossible to have proper rounds made by *white* doctors and nurses?"

They didn't think that would work. I thought, and still think, it would work if properly managed; but I admit my colossal ignorance of the difficulties which beset mining hospitals.

I walked through the wards. They were spotlessly clean and the sun streamed through the netted windows. Babies peered between the bars of their cots, puny small creatures who seemed to have no chance of recovery. A woman lay on her side, hugging her little girl in the crook of her arm and staring defiance at the nurses. The child was hideously burnt from the usual cause, sitting on the fire, and each time it had to be dressed the mother went berserk. A man with double pneumonia was propped up on his pillows. The sound of his breathing filled the ward and his emaciated face had curiously lost its dusky hue and looked yellow. Another man had been badly burnt in the mine, and two more had crushed limbs. As I went along the corridor four *capitaos* came at a jog-trot, bearing a stretcher covered with a sheet. Fatal accidents were rare at Mufulira, but not all human ingenuity can entirely prevent loss of life in mines. On the verandah was a woman who beat her breast —she was the wife of the figure under the sheet.

On the doorstep, very hot and angry, the Swedenborgian missionary argued with the Seventh Day Adventist about converts.

## IV

It was Peter who told me the story of the Luanshya snake. When working started at Roan Antelope extraordinary difficulty in getting labour was experienced. Nobody could understand this, because the natives had been eager to come south to other mines, but to offers of work at Roan they presented blank countenances and said, "No, thank you." Eventually the truth came out. Lurking in the deep pools of the twisting Luanshya river was Sanguni (a snake), a god of evil who dealt death and worse to anyone who disturbed him. The white man bribed, cajoled, thundered—all to no purpose. Natives over a thousand miles away knew of Sanguni and nothing would induce them to come near him. Fear percolated through the men

already employed at the mine. The slightest accident to white or black was caused by Sanguni, the least hitch in construction was due to his baleful influence. Time went on. Men were brought from far and near to disprove this fantastic story, but still recruits did not present themselves. Indeed, in desperation the company called together all those who claimed kinship with chiefs and asked them to go through the rites necessary to exorcise this Sanguni. This they were only too ready to do, and an orgy ensued during which spirit shrines were erected, and the blood of a white rooster was sprinkled, and sacrifices of meat and meal were offered, and a vast quantity of beer was swallowed. Alas, it turned out that no good could possibly come of a ceremony where the rites of certain tribes had been ignored while the rites of others had been practised, so Sanguni remained a bugbear.

In the end his death was brought about in the most ordinary manner. It was found necessary to canalise the Luanshya because of the risk from malaria, and no Sanguni, so the natives said with glee, could possibly exist in the foot or so of water which was all that was left after the scheme had been finished.

I said to Peter, "But surely you did not believe in Sanguni?"

"Oh, yes," he answered gravely, and I remembered James and his ex-wife. No matter how much surface education a native had, he could not rid himself of his beliefs.

"Why should he?" asked my host from Ndola, who had come out for the day. "What right have we to try to eradicate his beliefs when we don't offer him anything better in exchange?"

He was a wise man who had been a long time in the country and he shared with the *Bwana* the rare faculty of being able to see all round and sympathise with the native viewpoint. On this particular day he had journeyed to Mufulira in order to drive a prisoner into Ndola to be

questioned by the company's lawyers. This native drove a mine lorry and his story was that on rounding a sharp corner a car containing three white men crashed into him. Two white men were killed, the third injured, and feeling ran high. In the minds of most white people there was no doubt that the native was to blame.

"He always is," said the man from Ndola. "Poor devil, he's shivering in the police station now, waiting for me. But I'll make friends with him before I get him into town. Now come and taste the native beer."

I liked plodding round the compounds with this man. He was carefully ironic about Northern Rhodesia, but he loved her and her people, and as he had formerly commanded most of the ex-soldier *capitao*s who now did duty as native police our progress was positively royal. It was also satisfying, for these men had an affection for their officer untinged by servility, and no sooner had they saluted him than they poured out the history of all that had happened to them since last they saw him.

We strolled into the beer garden, a sandy oblong dotted with miniature huts where families took their ease by little tables on which were placed pitchers of beer. This was the lighter side of Mufulira, the side which showed the amenities provided for the native. Wives as well as husbands trotted up to the main building, received a ticket in exchange for a *tikki*, emerged proudly bearing their pitcher. Children played tig round the huts, jokes were bandied, shrill talk abounded. The nice old gentleman in charge of the place beamed upon me and led me through the long sheds where the grain lay in sacks. "See how hot it is," he said and undid the mouth of one.

I plunged my hand into it and gave a yelp for the grain was burning hot.

"Three kinds of grain we use, first letting it sprout in the sacks. Then we ferment it. See, here is yesterday's brew."

This was in three large vats which looked and smelt highly unpleasant. Greenish in colour, the liquid had thick froth on it.

"A trifle sour this time," the old gentleman shook his head. "And here is the woman who makes the beer for us."

She was a weird old crone, sitting cross-legged on a grinding stone. Constant beer-tasting through half a lifetime had rendered her chronically tipsy, but I gathered that she was, in her own line, a champion. Nobody within memory could make such beautiful beer, and however drunk she was her attention to her task never lessened. When she saw me she dipped a pitcher into the vat, filled it to the brim and handed it over with a toothless grin.

"Come along, no heel-taps. There's a quart there and you've got to drink it."

I took one sip and shuddered. The brew was so bitter it shrivelled my mouth, but an interested audience surrounded me and the smile of the man from Ndola roused my fighting-blood. I swallowed valiantly, but this seemed to have no effect on the quantity of stuff in the pitcher.

"It's grand stuff after a long day in the bush. Nothing like it for quenching thirst."

I handed him the pitcher. He finished the lot. Feeling very queasy in the innards I wandered through reading-rooms and play-rooms and examined the foods which were sold at a remarkably cheap price to those who, like myself, eschewed that awful beer. Finally, the old gentleman brought me a glass of lime-squash and I sat down thankfully on the verandah, averting my eyes from sight of the man from Ndola drinking yet another pitcherful.

"Don't they make beer from honey, too?"

"Only in private. It's very potent." He told me then of a visit to an important chief he had undertaken in the company of a high official unversed in African ways. The chief supplied his guests with honey-beer and, after the manner of the three bears, this was proffered in containers

of various sizes. The A.D.C. had a pint pot, my friend a quart pitcher, the high official an unmentionable enamel receptacle. Not unnaturally he felt it impossible to drink his beer, and the chief was greatly offended until it was gently explained to him that the use of such a vessel was considered an insult, whereupon he immediately gave orders that the follower who had assured him the white man would be honoured must be put to death at once. He escaped, by the skin of his teeth, but from that day he was banished from the tribe.

He told me other stories, too, and then we fell to discussing the white man's influence on the African. Before us was the peaceful beer-garden full of people enjoying brief leisure. Behind us was the hospital, the smelter, the mine. Far to our right a man sat quaking in the police-station wondering if, because his skin was dark, he would be convicted of the manslaughter of two white boys who had probably been under the influence of drink.

## v

Long before I reached Mufulira I was warned that there was one request I must not make—to go down the mine. Even the most important male visitors were not encouraged while no woman, under any circumstances whatever, was allowed down. There was, I must understand, a hoodoo on women in mines and the miners, being the most superstitious people imaginable, dreaded the thought of a female underground.

After all that I held my peace and couldn't believe my ears when my host asked me casually if I'd like to go down.

Wouldn't I! I went off to bed clasping a thick oil-skin jacket, a steel helmet and a pair of trousers, and promptly had a nightmare about Dante's Inferno.

Seven o'clock breakfast found me in morose mood. It looked as though all my hopes were to be dashed because

I couldn't sit down in the trousers. Never had I cursed my middle-aged spread so heartily, but after a hectic half-hour of trying on all the trousers in the house I at last achieved a pair which just fitted me, and by the time I had added an ancient sweater and a pair of thigh-high gum-boots to my outfit I didn't feel that the most far-sighted miner could discern my sex.

The cage was dripping wet, for the water which gushes through the dolomite rock is the greatest foe Mufulira has to face, and although there is an elaborate system of pumping, piping and canalisation, nothing can prevent the water from silting through to a certain extent. Down we went, a thousand feet, and emerged into an eerie, green-lit world.

"Our ventilation system is marvellous," they said.

I puffed, and slithered on over greasy duckboards, horribly sure that I should cascade into the rushing river which ran alongside. The water plopped on my steel helmet, my gum-boots squelched in it, the naked acetylene lamp someone had given me hissed madly. The heat was indescribable, a clammy, cruel heat which sapped all energy from your body. The tunnel was horribly quiet, and against its gleaming green walls half-naked black figures stood sentinel. All of a sudden there was a terrific roar and a line of trucks came helter-skelter towards us, piled high with lumps of ore. I splashed off the duckboards, tried to pretend I didn't mind, and plodded onwards.

Memory of the smelter faded. Here was something infinitely more awesome, this immense labyrinth a thousand feet below the earth's surface where black men and white laboured together. We passed a group of natives swinging picks at the rock, their eyeballs and teeth shining oddly in the queer light, and came to a hollow where an engineer from Durham, up to his waist in water, was preparing for blasting operations. Under his directions half a dozen natives scuttered madly, their bare feet curling in the most

astounding manner round ledges where it seemed impossible to stand.

We went on to a first-aid station, where men with red crosses sewn on their shirts stood solemnly beside a formidable array of bandages, bottles and stretchers. We crawled through rough holes to other tunnels, slithered over uneven rocks, went up in the cage some six hundred feet to where the huge pumps panted ceaselessly. They made you bow before the inventiveness of man, those pumps with their great highly polished bodies, their incredibly smooth running.

"Now we'll show you what strangers disapprove of," they said, and led me to another rail-track behind which was a sort of gigantic sieve with a narrow iron platform above it. On the platform were two natives armed with long rods rather resembling grappling-irons, *and they were chained to the rock-face behind them.*

"There you are. How the white man ill-treats the African. We had photographs taken in the mine once, and they got into the wrong hands with the result that a newspaper published one of these blokes and created a positive outcry."

Certainly at first sight these two men and their clanking chains looked fearsome, but when the trucks roared along and tipped masses of rock into the giant sieve and you saw them lean far forward to hook pieces too big to go through the mesh to one side, you realised that without the chains they would be hurled to ghastly death.

I stood with my mouth agape and watched the scene: the rumble and shriek of the trucks emerging from the tunnel, the automatic stop and the thunder of the falling ore, the lithe movements of the chained men on the little platform. So engrossed was I that I nearly fell to my own death when a searing pain attacked my left leg. I had forgotten all about the lamp I carried and it had burnt a large hole in my borrowed trousers! Shamed beyond

measure I beat at the smouldering stuff. Everyone was most kind, said that sort of thing happened every day and suggested we should sit down and have a cigarette.

I sniffed the air. "Is it safe?"

"Oh, yes," they replied easily. It may have been, but I never enjoyed a cigarette less.

Presently we moved on, but this time the man in front of me carried the lamp. Maybe they'd remembered the hoodoo that followed women in mines. "Do you mind a little climbing?" they asked courteously.

Privately I wondered what else I had been doing during the past two hours, but said politely I should be charmed. Only my host looked doubtful.

"It's frightfully rough," he murmured. "I don't think. . . ."

That settled it. With as much swagger as I could muster in boots two sizes too large for me I marched ahead.

The "climbing" was a descent of 200 feet by means of iron ladders suspended in blackness. I had never had any head for heights—indeed, winter-sporting in Switzerland they used to call me Tishy owing to my habit of stopping petrified on crossed skis in the middle of a snow-field—and the mere sight of the topmost rung of the ladder defeated me. But with me were seven or eight men, all of whom hung back to let me go first.

I went, and every step was an agony. I didn't dare look down into nothingness, I didn't dare look up, the mining-gloves on my hands were slithery with water, my body dripped with sweat. There were eight of those damnable ladders and each one had a ghastly habit of changing its course half-way down so that your foot pawed empty air madly and your heart performed alarming contortions and your tongue stuck to the roof of your mouth. To make matters worse, at the bottom of each ladder things called stopes had to be examined. These were short tunnels ending in an abyss down which rocks were hurled—and you

were also hurled if you didn't mind your step. That dratted mine was honeycombed with stopes, and along every one I had to bump and crawl since anything was preferable to being left alone in the dark at the top of a ladder.

At last we reached the ground-floor, so to speak, and paddled our wet way along to the cage. As we neared the surface my host looked at me and laughed. "You'd better call your chapter on the mines, *In and Under the Copper Belt.*"

He had cause for mirth. The heat had been so intense I had discarded my oilskin coat and my sweater was wringing wet. My steel helmet was cocked on one side of my head and rivulets of sweat made furrows on my muddy face. In addition, there were my holey trousers just to accentuate my disreputable appearance. But I was full of vain-gloriousness: I had been down the mine. "Can I climb the head-gear?" I asked. "I want to see the view over the Congo."

"Rather, but mind the oil on the handrails."

Jauntily I started. At fifty feet my rubber boots slipped uncomfortably on the narrow steps. At a hundred feet my head began to swim. At a hundred and eighty I cast one despairing glance down at Mufulira and spread-eagled myself on the platform beside the mighty skips which hauled the ore up and down to be broken into yet smaller pieces for the concentrator. I was furious. After a morning spent in negotiating those grisly ladders underground, to be defeated by a common or garden iron staircase in the open air was too much. Yet I dared not move. If I did so I should surely throw myself overboard.

Most ignominiously they had to send the policeman up to rescue me.

#### VI

"Don't go away," they said. "Stay here and we'll take you up the Luapula river, and to Elizabethville, and we'll go on fishing expeditions and have a grand time."

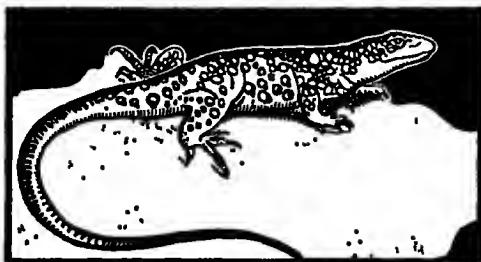
The last time they'd gone fishing a hippo had upset their boat and precipitated them all into a crocodile lake. That decided me. I sent a lot of telegrams saying I was unavoidably detained in the Copper Belt and settled down to more conversations with Peter.

Next day at lunch-time the blow fell when he brought me a wire. It was signed by the D.C., and it ran:

"Can you catch to-morrow's plane Broken Hill. Have arranged *safari* for you."

Long and lugubriously my host and I regarded each other. We had to remember that the poor D.C. had struggled to fit in that *safari* long before I arrived at the mines. I thought of elephant and felt happy; thought of hippo and felt sad. "I'll have to go."

"Yes," he said, "you'll have to go."



## CHAPTER VIII

### ULENDO

#### I

I HAULED myself aboard the night train at Ndola feeling thoroughly depressed and quite sure that the guard would be the same as on my upward journey and that the fine old game of passing the buck was about to begin all over again. But the guard wasn't the same; he was younger, fussier and very, very ubiquitous. He followed me into my compartment, informed me I was the only white passenger aboard, and plunked two cans of *Tusker* on the little table. "Now we'll have a nice drink and you can tell me your impressions of the Copper Belt."

I said I didn't want any beer, thank you, and that I found the Copper Belt wonderful, awe-inspiring and tragic all rolled into one.

He looked at me pityingly. "Man alive, it's a grand place. What did you think of the dynamo sheds?"

Unwittingly he had touched a sore spot, my ignorance of mechanics and electricity being so abysmal that I had once caused shrieks of mirth by referring to the "dash-board" instead of the switch-board. Changing the subject I told him I had been down Mufulira mine.

He nudged me in the ribs, a detestable habit, "Come off it. That be darned for a tall story!"

Then he tried again. "Aren't the Clubs fine?"

"Yes, very, so are the native beer gardens."

He was genuinely shocked. "My God, you don't tell me you went into one of those? It's easily seen *you* don't know anything about this god-forsaken country. Man, I've been out here five years and I tell you straight I wouldn't go near anything belonging to the bloody niggers if you paid me!"

That roused me. I sat bolt upright in my corner and gave him not only my opinion of the African but also of the white man who alluded to him as a "bloody nigger." In return he harangued me for a solid half-hour about my awful views. What did I know about the country, anyway? I was just one of those blasted wealthy folk who hared about in aeroplanes and ruined the nigger by smarming over him and giving him tips. He'd worked on the mines himself once and he knew that the only thing they understood was a *sjambok*. Why, man alive . . . and so on, and so on. "And it's not as if I wasn't a *gentleman*," he finished. "Why, you ought to see the place m'uncle has in England! Ten indoor staff and twenty outside. Three motor-cars and. . . ."

I could bear no more. "When is the first stopping-place? I want to telephone to Kapiri hotel for a flask of coffee."

He sniffed. He'd have me know that not all the wealth of the copper mines, not all the tea in China could enable me to telephone unless he allowed me to use the railway box of which he held the key. But to go back to m'uncle, he was a fine man if you like! He was in with all the big-wigs, of course, and had told his nephew all kinds of secrets of State when he had been home on leave back in the spring.

After some fifteen minutes of "m'uncle says" the train slowed down and the guard uncoiled himself from his seat beside me. "I've got to see to those lousy mails. You can come if you like; then I'll let you telephone."

I wanted my coffee badly, else I would have refused this condescension. We stumbled through the ill-lit native coaches to the van where the mail-bags lay in heaps on a rough ledge and the two native assistants lay in heaps on the floor. The guard gave each a well-aimed kick and let out a flood of kitchen Kaffir. One man sprang to his feet and cringed, the other rolled a malevolent eye but also rose and began

to open the mail-bags. "Haven't sorted the damn' stuff yet," grumbled the guard.

How he expected a couple of illiterate Nyasaland boys to sort letters I didn't inquire, but asked how long we stopped in the station.

"Until I've finished this job. Here, you can help." He shoved a large pile of letters across to me.

I shuffled them meekly. The night was penetratingly cold and I wanted that coffee; but when we had done the mail and walked the entire length of the train to the telephone box we could not get any reply from the exchange.

"It's always the same," said the guard. "I guess he's having a sleep."

I stared at the engine and shivered. A hairy arm beckoned me from the cab. "That bastard worrying you?" said the engine-driver.

"He's boring me to extinction."

"Right, jump up. You can ride in the cab a wee whilie, but mind and not split on me, for it's not allowed. See here, there was a lioness on the track last week, maybe we'll see her the night."

The invitation allured me, and for the next two hours I sat in the driver's little seat while he perched on the side of the cab negligently turning the wheel with one grimy paw while he gesticulated with the other and discussed, of all things, the Glasgow Exhibition. Every few minutes the fireman would clang the doors open and stoke his fire while I scorched pleasantly in my corner, but it was a grand sensation swaying through the bush in the darkness. We didn't see the lioness, but a leopard bounded into view so suddenly that I nearly fell on to the line with excitement, and several times we caught glimpses of baboons and wild-cats.

"It's a great life if you don't weaken," shouted the driver, and I nodded agreement. We smoked C. to C.s and I drank cold tea from a flask, and the rather silent fireman

unbent so far as to tell me all the names he had called the engine during the past seven years. She was certainly no longer in the flower of her youth, and I wondered she didn't disintegrate altogether under the torrent of vituperation with which he overwhelmed her, but somehow she chugged on through the night. "She's a fair queenie," said the driver, scowling at the steam-pressure gauge, "but any old rat-trap'll do for this line. Twenty-two year she's done this trip and I doubt she'll see my time out yet."

As we neared a station he shook his head at me. "You'll have to hop it now, lassie, but I've enjoyed our crack fine."

We parted sorrowfully and I trailed along to my compartment. The guard was there to greet me with fresh stories of m'uncle and much condemnation of my action in riding in the cab. "It isn't done," he informed me severely, and added, "you ought to see your face!"

I had long given up worrying about my face in Africa and said so with some asperity. "And I think I'll try to sleep now."

He then devastated me with kindness, dragging his own rug and pillow along from the van for me, tucking me up on the seat like a child. "I must tell you another thing m'uncle told me."

I weakened and asked the question I knew he'd been angling for all the time. "What is your uncle's name?"

His answer upset me so much I almost rolled off the seat, for it was a name renowned throughout the British Army. I lay and blinked at the light and wondered sleepily how m'uncle had ever achieved such a nephew. A voice said, "It's damn' cold. D'you mind if I sit a bit closer?"

I let out one vicious kick with my right foot, heard a muttered curse and slept undisturbed until we were nearing Broken Hill.

Curiously, the guard bore me no malice; indeed he was so solicitous for my welfare that I felt rather a cad. Did I

know Broken Hill? Man alive, but it was a great city! He lived in the suburbs himself, but of course he always came into the hotel for a sundowner— most *refined* hotel it was too, none of your rough stuff. He was glad I was going to see this centre of Northern Rhodesian elegance. “The spots you’ve been in are only third-rate dorps,” he said. “But Broken Hill!”

I said, “Oh, my!” and waited impatiently for the train to draw to a standstill.

I was a little disappointed. The station looked like any other African station. There was a small native village on one side of it and a mud yard backed by bush on the other. Maybe the city was some distance away?

The guard looked scandalised. “Oh, no, this *is* Broken Hill.”

He carried my traps to the booking-hall. There weren’t any staff and there weren’t any porters and the yard was innocent of the hotel bus which I had been assured would meet me. The time was five o’clock and the dawn air icy cold. “I’ll tell you what, I’ll carry your bags to the hotel for you. It’s on my way.”

I thanked him gratefully, regretting the viciousness of that kick more and more, and we sallied forth along a sandy path and then across a piece of waste ground littered with papers. “There,” the guard waved his arm dramatically, “*is* Broken Hill!”

I looked, and let the typewriter plop to the ground. Facing me was a row of derelict buildings, perhaps an eighth of a mile in length. They were of all shapes and sizes. Some of them had pillars from which the stucco had peeled in great patches, some of them had cracked windows, all of them were shabby. No, Broken Hill in the dawn was not an inspiring sight, and I understood now why the facetious always alluded to it as “Busted Hill.”

“But that can’t be *all* of it?”

“Man alive, but of course it is! Oh, it’s a great place.

See that small shop over there between two stores? Well, every time I look at it I'm reminded of the tuck-shop at the old school!"

Most cruelly I began to giggle. I tried to stop myself and couldn't. I just giggled on through the sand and along the street. Outside the hotel I managed to gasp, "Where are the suburbs?"

The guard pointed to the limitless scrub which seemed to surround the street. "Over there," he replied with dignity. He was sorely hurt, but I giggled my way into a deserted lounge, and when the manageress descended looking uncommonly like Florence Nightingale, lamp and all, I giggled at her.

She didn't approve of me at all. Yes, my telegram had arrived. No, they hadn't a room, surely I could see for myself how busy they were?

I looked vaguely round an array of potted palms and empty chairs and said, "Oh, yes," in a weak voice. "But it is only for a few hours. I'm catching the eleven o'clock plane north."

Her majesty did not lessen. "Follow me, I will see what can be done."

We walked out to a courtyard filled with flaming poinsettias and did an amazing round of the doors which opened on to it, listening at each one for sounds of the sleepers of Broken Hill; but it was soon all too clear that each room held a snoring occupant. "You will have to rest in the lounge for an hour. One of my gentlemen is being called at six; then you can have his room."

An awful weariness descended upon me. "Can I have a bath?"

"At seven o'clock," said the lady primly.

I trailed back into the lounge, drew two arm-chairs together, distributed myself over them and fell asleep under the potted palms, but it seemed I had scarcely closed my eyes when a boy jogged my elbow. "Room ready, come along."



MARY IN HER MACHILA



I shouldn't have called the room exactly ready. In it, in front of a microscopic mirror, a large man with a red face was tying his tie. "Come right in," he called cheerfully. "I'm just off. Boy, bring another cup for the lady."

I sat down dazedly on the rumpled bed. "Bit parky these early mornings, isn't it?" queried my companion. He seized the cup from the boy, filled it with black liquid from the teapot on the dressing-table and handed it to me. "That's the stuff to revive you," he said with a wink. "I put a spot of *dop* in the pot."

I drank mechanically. The tea was very sweet, very strong and liberally laced with Cape brandy. I think I was asleep again before my benefactor had left the room.

At nine o'clock, bathed and rested, I set out to inspect Broken Hill. I stared at the windows of the African Lakes Corporation Stores, and I bought a stick of toffee at the "old school tuck-shop," and I watched two men trying to get a cow into a lorry. After that, realising I had explored the town thoroughly, I came back to breakfast.

The waiter said, "I have a dress-suit, *Mama*. Is it not a nice dress-suit?"

I said, "Yes, please can I have an egg?" He said, "Eggs are third course. First porridge, then steak, then eggs. After that," he grinned widely, "what you like."

"But I don't like porridge!"

"Porridge, never mind, eat," and he thumped a large plate in front of me.

Broken Hill seemed a kind of exhausting place in which to live.

The porridge was *malt*, the steak was, I imagine, goat, the eggs doubtful. I tackled half a melon and felt better.

I walked out into the lounge to find the guard ensconced in a corner sipping a whisky and soda. Sundowners began early in Broken Hill.

"Just came along to see you off," he said expansively.  
"Have a drink?"

"No, thank you." What a man! He forgave kicks, giggles, studied insults, turned up again as ubiquitous as ever.

I went across to pay my bill and said politely, "But I didn't have a whisky and soda?"

"No," said the clerk cheerfully. "But your pal did."

It was a double. I paid.

The manager hustled in full of explanations as to why the lorry hadn't met me at the station. "It was at the airport, you see, for the early plane. Air passengers are so important."

I trailed out and took my seat. The guard followed.  
"It's a pity we hadn't time for another drink."

I said, "Oh, my!"

At the aerodrome I fell into the arms of Fatty and implored him to remove me from Broken Hill as quickly as possible. Clerks hustled up. "Are you going to Shiwa Ngandu?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm going on *safari*."

"But you sent a message last week that you wanted to be landed at Shiwa Ngandu?"

"Yes, but I didn't know then I was going to change my plans."

"But you can't. . . ."

I climbed firmly into the plane and sat down. "Drown them," I said to Fatty and went to sleep for the third time that morning.

## II

For myself I like the Chibemba word *ulendo*, meaning a journey, far better than the Swahili word *safari* which is more universally used even in Northern Rhodesia. There is

a sweet, leisurely sound about *ulendo* entirely suited to long treks through the bush and on our particular journey, although the D.C. proposed to do quite a lot of hunting, he also had to dispense justice at the various villages so that *safari* was really not a rightful name.

I reached Mpika to hear that I was going to achieve my heart's desire: return to Shiwa Ngandu on foot. For that was the way in which paradise ought to be approached, a way in which modern machines had no part and the visitor had to rely solely on his own physical powers.

We were to start early on the morrow and the house was buzzing with preparations. Carriers, game guards and the D.C.'s messengers filled the courtyard; in the store-room Mrs. D.C. weighed out butter, ghee, flour, sugar, tea and coffee; in the house the two pet mongooses scuttered to and fro unchecked. I lifted both of them by their tails out of a jam-pot and wandered down to the village to inspect the local gaol. It held four prisoners, one obviously a simpleton, and they were squatting before a big fire. No gaoler was in sight—he had gone to fetch the evening meal, but nobody seemed in the least concerned and it struck me that the prisoners were far too contented with their lot to attempt to break loose. What was the fun of freedom when it meant the arduous task of keeping yourself and your family? Gaol was definitely better, for there you were fed by the State and your duties were light and your fire was provided for you.

All evening we pored over maps and I retired early to my guest-room, a dear small round hut near the house which boasted a bathroom of its very own, and awakened to a clamour of sound. Two messengers, four game guards and sixty carriers seemed a lot for five white people, one of whom was only three years old, but that was the way one travelled on *ulendo*, and apparently all sixty of them were in the yard, all talking at once, all arguing, all laughing.

The first part of our route led us by the road, so I was

asked if I would like to ride a horse or a *jinga*. Basely, I chose the *jinga*—and regretted it before the morning was half through. The cavalcade started in fine style, first the D.C., on a black, plunging beast rightly called Satan, then Mrs. D.C. and Mademoiselle, both mounted, then myself wobbling piteously on the *jinga*, then three-year-old Mary in a very fine *machila*,<sup>1</sup> then the long snaky trail of henchmen. It was a grand sight for Mpika and everyone, including the Indian store-keeper who could never sell you anything because he was always worshipping Mohammed in his back garden, turned out to cheer us on our way.

Dust undid me. My wheels sank into it, the hooves of the horses in front threw it back into my face, my mouth, eyes, ears, nose and shoes were full of it, the natty navy denim skirt which was the united effort of Mr. Shem and the Shiwa house-tailor turned to a dull grey. Struggle as I would I could not ride that *jinga* through ruts in which the dust was a good eight inches deep, so I spent most of the morning collapsing into a heap on the road and picking myself up again. The water-bag slung on my handle-bars developed an awful fascination for me as the sun grew stronger, and I had to fight down the longing to drink every drop it contained. A hot wind blew my hair over my face, my body stung and prickled, I wondered grimly if I should ever reach Shiwa.

About noon we stopped at a village and had sat down by the roadside to suck oranges when Satan, who was about to be ridden home by a messenger, suddenly careered off into the bush. It took half an hour to find him: I didn't try, I just had a second orange and examined the blisters which seemed to have sprung to life on my feet. Somehow my first fine fervour for *ulendo* had died.

It revived as we left the hated road and struck on foot up a hill path to Chitinde. This was good, just a narrow track

<sup>1</sup> A box-shaped affair of wood framework covered with mosquito netting and balanced on a pole which the carriers hoist on their shoulders.

with the bush closing in on either side of it. Mademoiselle and I pulled long noses at civilisation but were slightly taken aback when the D.C. told us that *chitinde* meant manure in Chibemba.

“But why call a village manure?”

“Because the chief had many cattle.”

After that logical explanation I demanded to know the name of every village we passed.

It was mid-afternoon when we neared Chitinde and every man, woman and child in the place rushed out to greet us, making the odd woo-woo-woo sound by playing the tips of their fingers against their lips and cavorting all round us. To them the D.C. was a great chief worthy of the highest honour, and all through our journey I was to derive infinite amusement from sight of this tall Englishman looking acutely embarrassed, following the women of the tribe who were doing what we called the “chicken dance”, an amazing business wherein they scuffed up the dust with their toes and shook their bodies frantically.

While the servants unloaded pots and pans and cooked us vast quantities of ham and eggs I sat in the centre hut and listened to the D.C. counting the people and studying their problems. They asked his advice on all manner of things, from divorce to the possibility of being issued with a muzzle-loader, and to every question, however futile, he made detailed and courteous reply. How he kept his sanity I do not know, for when he wished to get at the truth of anything he had to beat about countless bushes before getting an answer which was probably far from accurate. Why did the headman wish to move his village farther into the hills? Not only the headman but several other people rushed forward with gabbled explanations. The new site was nearer the salt pans, the ground here was unfertile, the people wanted to be closer to Chikwanda, their chief. What they really wanted was to be farther from the *boma*, as the D.C. well knew, but they had no least intention of

admitting this, and if he openly tackled them with it they would immediately withdraw into their shells and pretend to be half-witted.

This was the real Government of Northern Rhodesia, this solitary Englishman who had to cope with the intricacies of the native mind, insist upon fairness all round, solve problems which would have defeated Solomon—and keep his temper. He had to know the language, for interpreters are never wholly to be trusted; he had to look after a district bigger than Wales; he had to satisfy Lusaka and beyond that the Colonial Office, that his work was being adequately carried out. All over the vast territory he and his fellows were doing this job with a thoroughness quite admirable, and it was astonishing to me how they kept the peace with the native chiefs, for this indirect rule was surely one of the trickiest businesses in the world.

I wandered back to the others to find them tucking into a colossal meal and promptly joined them. So far as I remember I had three eggs, as many rashers, and innumerable slices of bread, butter and guava jelly. Replete, we rested while the servants packed up again, then moved on to Kafuko which means "the little mole," an edible creature highly prized by the Bemba. Here the poor D.C. had to go all through the same palaver but we basely deserted him and walked on to Masaka<sup>1</sup> on the hill-top where we were to camp.

Sitting in a deck-chair watching the boys I realised why five people needed sixty carriers. Within a few minutes a wide space was cleared by the simple expedient of hacking down trees, the three tents were up, Dismus the cook was fussing round his kitchen fire, Rufus the house-boy was putting out crockery, Sefarino the wash-boy was boiling kerosene tins of water, the messengers were yelling themselves hoarse as they superintended the erection of our bathroom and lavatory. For there was no lack of comfort about

<sup>1</sup> *Masaka*—Chibemba word for feet. Most likely meaning buck spoor.

our *ulendo*. By some sleight of hand Dismus provided us with three handsome meals a day, including a three-course dinner each night, and even made fresh bread by setting the dough in basins in the embers of his fire. We had hot baths in the collapsible bath set up in our woven-grass bathroom—and there is nothing so lovely as lying in your bath gazing up at the Southern Cross high in the clear sky—we had enormous log fires each night, we had comfortable beds.

Best of all we were far away from white people, telephones, radio and newspapers. We were Robinson Crusoes with sixty Man Fridays to act as buffers between us and discomfort.

At five o'clock the D.C. rose from the tea-table, and beckoned the game guards. "Are you coming hunting?" he asked me.

Of course I was. This was the *pièce de résistance* of my day, but as I stood up my limbs protested. I had only walked some twelve miles, yet I was so stiff that every step made me groan. Somehow I wobbled along the path to the village where a small boy with a spear was awaiting us. "He knows where the game is mostly likely to be."

The bush was very thick and full of spiky grasses that slashed the ankles. Cautiously we moved through it to the edge of a *dambo* recently burned by a bush fire. Here the tender green sprigs of elephant grass were pushing through the blackened soil and these were succulent food for the game. We sprawled on our stomachs on an ant-hill and scanned that *dambo* through our glasses until our eyeballs ached, but there was no vestige of buck or hartebeeste, of elephant or eland. At last we manœuvred our way right round it without any luck and then struck into the bush again as night fell. I tried to lift the elephant gun and wondered however the D.C. managed to carry it so easily on his shoulder, and the guards slanged the small boy because he had not provided better sport. The camp seemed a long way away and the bush crackled with

mysterious sounds. I could just see the dim outline of the D.C.'s broad shoulders ahead of me and thought fearfully that at any moment I should step on a snake, and when the glow of our camp-fires lit the distant sky I heaved a sigh of relief. We had walked eight miles, we had seen one lesser bustard and countless honey birds, big-game hunting wasn't so exciting as I had imagined.

## III

We trekked on, moving ever further and further away from the road. I lost all track of time and knew only that this business of walking, eating and sleeping was a superb way of living. We rose at dawn to find the servants busily removing all traces of our occupation, shivered as we drank tea and nibbled biscuits, set out through the clear morning air for our next stopping-place. Wisely, we broke the back of our day's march in the early hours, halting about eleven o'clock when we demolished a huge meal and rested a couple of hours. Then we ambled contentedly on until three or four in the afternoon when we fixed on a camp site, had tea, and went hunting. After dinner we wrapped ourselves in every garment we possessed, lay in long chairs before the dancing fire and talked of Africa.

We were in no hurry. Fifteen or eighteen miles a day was all we covered, and during this leisurely progress I became, under the D.C.'s tutelage, a specialist in dung. I learnt to tell lion spoor from leopard, bush buck from roan antelope, hartebeeste from wildebeeste. So fascinating did this subject grow that I even gave up studying the strange bush flowers—great bushes bearing a cross between dahlias and chrysanthemums, blood-red lilies, strange greenish orchis, tiny stars like scarlet pimpernels, golden iris by the swamps. These beauties no longer interested me. I walked with my eyes on the ground giving squeaks of delight when I saw spoor. I learnt too how to walk lightly and silently,

how to dribble the sand through my fingers to test which way the wind blew, how to stalk game and ensure they did not get my wind.

We were moving through one of the noted big-game reserves but, alas, the native and his muzzle-loading gun had been busy for the past several years and had practically shot out the buck, eland, hartebeeste—any game that was eatable, although ostensibly Government had issued them with guns so that they might protect their villages and gardens from depredations by elephant and leopard. To the Bemba, however, a gun spelt meat, and it was a pity to shoot elephant since if you did so you had less excuse for demanding more muzzle-loaders, so we hunted for days without seeing more than tiny klip-springers chasing up the hill-sides and the bob-tails of duikers.

I was intrigued too by the behaviour of Mary, and wondered if my own children, at her tender age, would have shown one-tenth of her self-possession. By day she rode in her *machila*, her two carriers carrying on a violent conversation above her head. They went at an uneven jog-trot over the roughest ground, through swamps and rivers, up and down precipitous slopes, but Mary never turned a hair. She would sit placidly in her green-netted home playing with her teddy-bear, or drawing pictures of which she could make two copies, thanks to a sheet of my carbon paper, or eating tangerines. And when she tired of these ploys she stuck her fat thumb in her mouth, curled up on her pillow and went to sleep. Generally her mother's knitting, Mademoiselle's book and my coat were flung willy-nilly on top of her, but nothing disturbed that child's peace. When we halted for meals she would trot round talking to the servants and when the villagers, attracted by the strange sight of a white child, gathered in a circle to watch her, she behaved with complete politeness and equanimity. I began by being sorry for the child, for her *machila* had to serve as bed at night as well as carriage by

day: I ended with whole-hearted envy of her calm acceptance of a foreign way of living.

Sometimes when we struck a widish path I would summon my *jinga*, but my essays to ride almost always ended in disaster. To begin with my *jinga* boy could never be found and when he was hustled to the front produced a long forked stick which he thrust into the middle of my back with a war-cry each time we came to the slightest upward slope: to end with Julius, the youth who carried the cyclometer, got in my way. That boy was a menace. For quite a while my classically stupid brain could not conceive why he careered along with a pair of handlebars and a solitary wheel, but even when I solved this problem he still remained a nuisance. No sooner did I reach a stretch of path which required distinct negotiation than Julius would rush ahead, hurling himself and wheel across my road and causing me to topple off into the bush. The times I knocked that boy down were legion, yet he never slackened in his enthusiasm for tearing forward at the worst possible moment. In the end I eschewed the *jinga* and relied on my feet.

## IV

Early on in my camp career I sampled the joys of evening surgery. We carried a large medicine-chest, and each evening before dinner aid was dispensed to those who wanted it—which meant that most of our sixty henchmen developed foul diseases and people from whichever village we were camped near came in positive battalions. The D.C., tired after many palavers and a long spell of hunting, was having first bath so I, in my innocence, volunteered to take surgery with the aid of Sefarino, who spoke some English. It was dark, so we had to work by fire and lamp-light, and I had a distinct shock when I glanced up from the medicine-chest and saw a host of black figures gathered

round the table. But I had been coached so said briskly, "Coughs first, please."

There were about nine coughers. They stood in a line making the most revolting gargling sounds while I spooned a virulent mixture (reminiscent in smell of the *Benbow* famous in the doggy world) down their unresisting throats. One dose of that stuff would have finished me, but the Bemba adored it and came back nightly for more.

The next item was fever, so I doled out quinine tablets and salts with a grand impartiality and thought how simple surgery-hour was.

I met my Waterloo in stomach-aches. The first applicant for treatment was a squat little carrier who hugged his middle and moaned. "Dreadful pain," said Sefarino gloomily. I prodded the rotund body with tentative fingers and thought wildly of appendicitis, but rejected the idea as I had seen the man heaving loads about all day that would have strained an ox. Besides, he had had the pain three days and it was always worse after a meal of *malt* porridge. Half the camp began excited explanations and the sufferer capered round the fire. In desperation I reverted to type and said severely to Sefarino, "Ask him if his bowels are working."

Sefarino stared blankly. The patient emitted a howl of agony. A voice from the bathroom split the darkness, "Give him a Livingstone rouser, you — fool!"

I buried my head confusedly in the medicine-chest and burrowed for the Livingstone rousers.

A tall man leapt into the firelight. We called him the lion man because he used to roar frantically to scare the piccanins who followed the carriers from each village. Possessed of great physical strength he was a trifle wanting in grey matter, but he had a certain cunning for he never did a stroke of work if he could help it, and was adept at sitting up a tree brandishing an axe while his fellows were

putting up the tents. "Itch!" he yelled, and began to strip off his few garments.

Sefarino saved me. Seizing the tin of itch-paint in one hand and a basin of hot water in the other, he chivvied the lion man into the bush.

There were seven itch patients, and each one cantered off with Sefarino to return clothed but wriggling with the irritation of the paint. Meantime I dealt with cuts and ulcers. One man had his big toe practically severed from his foot, another had a jagged tear from calf to ankle, many had septic ulcers which had to be seen to be believed. How they walked and worked with these things I don't know; I only know that if they had been white men they would have been bed-ridden. We did the best we could. We bathed them with antiseptic, put hot fomentations on them, bandaged them up. (I have a photograph of my own carrier bandaged from knee to foot, and while I know the horrible open sores beneath that bandage I also know that he carried on his head the tin box containing my clothing for well over a hundred miles.) Our treatment was rough and casual to a degree and without any real knowledge to back it yet somehow it answered, and many times when I was working on a pathetic brown limb I thought sardonically of the outcry there would be if any patient in an English hospital was subjected to such inefficiency.

A lot of the ailments, I do believe, were cured by faith. These folk honestly *believed* that the white man and his medicine chest could relieve them of all ills and about the camp surgery-hour, where they were in their own country among their own people, there was nothing of the strange and terrifying atmosphere of the hospital at Kasama, some two hundred miles away. One old man who was suffering from a cataract in both eyes was brought in from a village. He sat and blinked at us, sightless but faithful. We would cure him, we would restore his vision. When it was gently

explained to him that we had no help for him unless we sent him to Kasama he went back to his home and sat dejected before his hut. We saw him there the next morning, a thin, tired old figure staring at a world he could not see. He had lost faith and very soon he would die from sheer inanition.

In a village I saw a woman with the dreaded signs of leprosy on her face and arms. She swung past me, her baby slung on her back, her gaze averted. I told the D.C., and he searched for and found her husband and told him his wife must go to hospital. He nodded violently and disappeared. Within a few hours that woman had vanished. She was working in her garden, she had gone an expedition to some other village, she had not been seen anywhere. Everybody shielded her and it was only when we reached the chief's village that it was possible to prevail upon him to insist that she journey to the road and catch the mail lorry. Couldn't we do anything for her? We couldn't, and as I remembered her proud carriage and her averted eyes I thought of the *Bwana*'s story of how he had taken a leper to Kasama only to find there was no treatment available for him. This woman, too, might undertake the long and frightening journey to find—nothing. Almost it seemed better to leave her where she was, hiding in the bush until we had gone, but then the disease would spread to her child, to the whole village, to goodness knows how many other natives, and that was unthinkable. The D.C. made out passes for her and wrote notes to the hospital authorities. I doubt if she ever moved from her home at Nshitima which means, incongruously enough, steam engine. Because we could not heal her wounds she, too, had lost faith in the white man.

## v

Every evening when we were settled in camp a procession arrived from the village bearing live fowls (priced sixpence

each), bowls of millet, sweet potatoes, ground-nuts and cassava leaves and, after the custom of Africa, the D.C. had to accept these as *presenti* and dole out largesse an hour or so later, because each *presenti* calls for a return of some kind. The chickens were scrawny birds with precious little meat on them, and despite the number which seemed to abound in the villages Dismus spent his days bribing folk for eggs. In the most ostentatious way he would plank a pail of water on the ground and test each egg brought to him. If it proved good he bought it; if it proved bad—as most of them did—he tossed it back to the owner with such force that it usually broke in transit.

The cassava leaves, which tasted like delicate spinach, and the sweet potatoes were kept for our use; the *male* and ground-nuts went to feed our retinue, for the feeding of sixty people was no light job when all stores had to be carried.

I liked this system of *presenti*, liked more the attitude of the villagers towards us. Remote from civilisation as they were the advent of five white people was a terrific sensation, yet they retained their natural courtesy and I cannot believe that their behaviour was prompted by the presence of the D.C. It was simply that they liked him personally and had proved his worth during the past several years and that their inherent good manners insisted they give us such hospitality as they owned.

In the intervals of spoor-finding I collected names of villages. Samfwa—a mushroom; Papibwana—the one who carries his child on his back, an unusual name since the Bemba men are never known to carry their young, but although we asked many questions we never found its origin; Pabulabantu—lacking in men, a saying all too true since each time the D.C. inquired where so-and-so had disappeared to the answer was “Luanshya.” Even from these far places the men had journeyed south to the mines, and in Pabulabantu particularly the population consisted of aged

men, a great many women and children. They were proud of their absent ones, but a little nervous as to the probable date of their return. They knew too well how fathers of families who went to Luanshya forgot their home obligations and formed new ties in a distant country.

When I had last bath I would spend the time after surgery in exploring the camp, marvelling anew at the easy way in which the Bemba existed. Having picked grass for their beds and set the pot of porridge to boil, the groups of carriers squatted round their fires, either snuffing or smoking. They were very friendly; they would show me some herb they had found on the day's march, or some mongrel pup they had picked up in a village and explain in pantomime all about their trophy. They had so few wants —warmth, food and wages of fourpence a day. And they made me feel ashamed of my frantic dashes to the D.C. with a request to remove a praying mantis or a tarantula from the sides of my tent, (one night my ogres turned out to be nothing more than a couple of large crickets) because they lay, huddled in their ochre blankets, among all the perils of the bush without a thought of danger.

It was the sublime trust of these Bemba which awed me. They trusted in Lesa, they trusted in the *mipashi*, they trusted in their chief, most devastating of all they trusted in us. They were children more simple than any to be found in the western world, and their virtues and vices were those of the extremely young. They had also the courage of the child and would attack without fear a wild beast that threatened their peace, and as I watched them day by day the conviction within me grew ever stronger—it was wrong to send these people to the towns and the mines.

But it was also wrong to leave them in their present state. We had come among them, preached many doctrines to them, striven to interest them in our schemes for what we termed their "betterment." All right, then we had to reap what we had sown, for in their childish minds had evolved

a vast desire to live as the white man lived, to be as clever as the white man was.

Night after night the D.C. and I went at the problem of Africa hammer and tongs. It appeared that the indirect rule which I felt was so difficult to manage was, in his opinion, a definite step forward in Government, since it gave back to the chiefs not only the power to settle innumerable petty ructions among their tribes, but ten per cent of the annual head tax, generally about 7s. 6d. per head for men capable of working. It had also ensured that the endless delay involved in the submitting of district reports first to Provincial Commissioners, then to the Chief Secretary, finally to the Governor for sanction could be avoided. Lusaka had not relished this decision which emanated from Whitehall and had, so far as I could see, put innumerable obstacles in the way of its smooth working. I wasn't surprised; if you wanted to see bureaucracy run riot you only wanted to study local Colonial Government.

But what worried me was the position of the chiefs. Bereft of much of their power they had managed to retain a tremendous hold over their people, but this was gradually weakening principally because they could not dazzle their followers with plans for advancement because they literally had no money. The head-tax was difficult enough to collect, and the ten per cent which was collected ill-sufficed for their requirements. "Have your own treasures," said Lusaka superbly. "Do what you will for your people."

A grand sentiment, but the plain fact was the native treasures were bust. The paramount chief had to pay "out of the treasury" subsidies to his chiefs, salaries to clerks, and payments to his *kapasus* (court constables; anglicised version, High Officers of State). There was no evading such payments because a kindly Government had fixed them. After all this the paramount chief had to keep himself and his family, and to me the fact that Chitimukulu's

greatest personal expenditure in 1936 was £4 5s. od. for a bicycle is all-revealing.

Certainly there was a move afoot to increase the percentage of tax payable to the native treasury, but even so it was hard to see how the paramount chief could possibly afford to help his people very much.

To the D.C. I waxed temperamental. "But they're *his* people; they jogged along quite nicely for centuries before we put our noses in."

"I know, I know, but it's not so easy as all that. We've got to evolve some system which will really help them, which will take away the remnants of cruelty and savagery and lead them towards civilisation."

But when I asked him if he would stop talking like a book he grinned and plunged into discussion of native affairs as seen through the eyes of the powers that be. Mainly political, this discussion irritated me, and anyway it has no place in this book. "But why can't you cut all that cackle?"

He would have liked to do so, for he was one of the most direct individuals I had ever met; but he sighed and said, "Have you ever thought what it is like to drag information out of a chief or a headman and so present that information through a variety of channels to headquarters that they will pay attention to it?"

I said, "But you know, and in a lesser degree I know, that the natives need every imaginable thing done for them!"

"No," he said. "Nobody knows what really ought to be done. All we know is that we've shown them the white man's ways and that we've got somehow to make them use those ways for their own advantage. We can't take possession of a territory and leave it flat, you know. My own view is that we ought to collectivise the natives. Look at them at present—no centre, no markets, no concentration of any kind."

We worked out a grand scheme on the lines of the Soviet collective farm—but the *Bwana* blew it sky-high when we

reached Shiwa. That was the trouble with this Africa, you no sooner planned a water-tight scheme for the betterment of its people than the next authoritative person you met made you feel the world's prize mug.

## VII

One evening we plodded in from hunting to be told that Mrs. D.C., who had gone in the opposite direction with two game guards, had not yet returned. It was quite dark, so the D.C. said he would go to look for her as she had probably found game and was tracking it through the bush. While Mademoiselle put Mary to bed I sat by the fire trying to read, but wondering all the time if she was all right. The forest was thick and very lonely, and despite the fact they had both been with *Bwana* Ross the game guards were stupid creatures. Then the drums began to beat and the sound of them rolled through the night, through the camp, into the very marrow of my bones. THUD-thud-thud-THUD-thud they went, and the hair rose on my head, and Mademoiselle dashed out to see what was wrong. Mary was unperturbed; she sat up in her dressing-gown, banged a spoon on the table and demanded hot "Klim,"<sup>1</sup> but we shivered by the fire and wished that ghastly sound might stop, although we knew that it would guide the hunters home. THUD-thud-thud-THUD-thud, it thrummed into every nerve, set the whole mind a-jangle. And it went on, and on, and on. We talked stiltedly to each other. Mademoiselle had her bath and I had mine, still to the rhythm of the drums. Suddenly above that appalling noise came the clear, high note of a hunting-horn. We breathed again—the D.C. had found his wife.

Half an hour later they limped into camp. She had wounded a hartebeeste and followed its spoor in vain through the growing darkness. The next morning, they decided,

<sup>1</sup> Powdered milk in tins.

Mademoiselle, Mary and myself would go ahead with the carriers while they stayed behind to try to find its spoor and put it out of its misery.

So at dawn we set forth, swinging down the hill to the Nakafima river named after the "Mother of him who broke sticks," a wide stream spanned by one of those horrific bridges so prevalent in this country. With my heart in my mouth I watched Mary's *machila* swaying perilously across a flimsy contraption of two logs and a narrow bough as handrail and then tried my own luck. A messenger stretched out a helping hand. "Lots of snakes, *Mama!*" If he hadn't said that I doubt if I should have reached the far side in safety, but eventually our whole train managed the crossing without mishap and we marched on along a path bordered by papyrus (elephant) grass which waved high above our heads.

The way to Lubemba, the next village, led up a steep hill, and as we panted up this we entirely forgot the D.C.'s warning that in it lived the chief Chikwandum, an enterprising young man by whom he set great store. Indeed, my first reminder of Chikwandum was a series of wild woo-woo-woos which greeted me just as I was climbing up a particularly slippery rock-face. One is never at one's best when thus surprised and I, clinging valiantly with fingernails to a piece of dolomite and poking an inquiring head above the rock, was definitely at my worst. Unfortunately, there was no escape. Striding majestically down the path behind his people was Chikwandum himself, a pleasant, stout person with a broad smile and a white duck suit.

Now the D.C. had not taken his family on this particular *ulenzo* before, so Chikwandum naturally took me for Mrs. D.C., and gifted me with the parentage of Mary, in whom he took an intense interest. Heralded by alarming yells and surrounded by the entire tribe Mademoiselle and I made a triumphant entry into Lubemba, Chikwandum bowing us forward.

We were led with much ceremony to the centre hut, where a deck-chair and a wooden stool were provided for us. We sat down rather breathlessly, released Mary from her *machila*, smiled gratefully at Chikwandu and racked our brains as to what to do next. Chikwandu knew no English; we had already exhausted our stock of "*mapoleni!*" and "*mutendi!*" Graciously he proffered a gourd of snuff. As graciously I took a pinch, sneezed violently and, forgetting Mulemfwe, handed him my box of cigarettes. There were forty-nine in that box: Chikwandu helped himself to forty-eight and stuck the forty-ninth jauntily behind his head-man's ear.

By dint of much gesticulation, feeble imitation of rifle shots and reiteration of the word "*hartebeeste*" we conveyed to him the knowledge that the D.C. would shortly arrive. At least, he nodded portentously, plumped himself on a tiny stool facing us, and stared.

The tribe also stared. We were hungry, thirsty and very hot and our seats were set in the full glare of the sun. We hadn't a cigarette left so were forced to watch Chikwandu and his headman puffing luxuriously. We couldn't speak to each other because it seemed rude, and we couldn't speak to him because we didn't know enough of his language. Each way I moved my eyes met the unwinking stare of a Bemba.

We sat, and we sat. At last Chikwandu rose, pointed beyond the village and set off at a brisk trot. We followed; anything was better than sitting in front of that hut. Half a mile outside he paused and issued commands to his men, who began at once to slash the bush to bits in the most extravagant manner. Within twenty minutes they had erected a hedge of woven boughs to protect us from the wind, and just as they had finished Rufus, Dismus and Sefarino pedalled slowly into sight on their *jingas*. "No *hartebeeste*," they said mournfully. "The *Bwana* comes."

Chikwandu flew back to the village, but the women and

children stayed. They didn't see our like very often and they were bent on making the most of us. We left them to the politenesses of Mary and sank thankfully into our chairs; but when the woo-woo-woos began again I rose and walked back, for I felt in my bones that the dispensation of justice in Chikwandum's home was going to be worth listening to . . . and I was right.

The D.C. was already seated before his travelling table assessing head tax, and the word "Luanshya" was running from mouth to mouth as he inquired the whereabouts of various men. Before him Chikwandum and his counsellors sat primly, behind them again the rest of the tribe squatted on the ground.

"The chief wishes you to see the mutilated people. I have explained to him you are a stranger to the country."

Chikwandum bowed and grinned as the messenger interpreted. Obviously he was disappointed in me because I wasn't the mother of Mary and the owner of great power, but he wanted to show the stranger within his gates every hospitality.

I smiled faintly. "But I don't want to see mutilated people."

"Never mind, for heaven's sake pretend to be impressed."

Out of the crowd stepped a thing scarcely human, clad in a tattered piece of black stuff swathed round his emaciated body. I had heard and read much of the blind court-singers of Chitimukulu but I had never imagined anything quite so terrible as the old creature who drooped in front of me. Instead of a nose he had two gaping holes, instead of hands and feet he had four smooth, black stumps, and down his bare breast curved the cicatrices of ancient, cruel wounds. The two lads who were holding him upright let him go suddenly and he slumped on to the ground and began to chatter, and I saw that he had no lips.

"The chief says, would you like to photograph him?"

"No."

The parley went on. One man wanted a muzzle-loader, and Chikwandum shook his head because he knew the fellow became violent after beer orgies. Someone else wanted to join the army, but explained that as he had a cold in the head at the moment he would wait until he felt better. The headman of the next village, who knew better than anyone how to follow the honey-bird and lift the sweet comb from the trees was dispossessed because these expeditions always ended in a bout of terrific swearing at his men. The hundred petty problems of village life came up for review, but try as I might I could not avert my eyes from the mutilated man who now sat so quietly at my feet, his terrible face turning this way and that as the argument went on.

In a lull in the proceedings I asked the D.C. if the tribesmen were kind to him.

"Now they are, because he is old and helpless. The women give him food and the children see to his fire. But for a long time he was more or less an outcast. He had offended against tribal law, you see—adultery with a chief's wife, I gather, although he swears he was innocent—and the last Chitimukulu punished him."

"But how did he live through such frightful mutilation?"

"I've seen them live through worse. After the mutilation they plunged his legs and arms into boiling fat; added agony, but it prevented the stumps from growing septic."

"Has he no wife, no child?"

"Oh, no. When they had finished with him he was no longer a man."

The discussion with Chikwandum went on and I tried to visualise what the mutilated one's life must have been since his crime. I couldn't; the thing was too ghastly to comprehend fully. But he sat there in the dust, his eyes fixed on my face, his atrocious stumps sticking from beneath his ragged garment. He was one of the reasons why the white

man had decided that the tribesman was unfitted to rule his people; he was the other side of the medal.

The palaver ended and the D.C. rose. Chikwandum gabbled something and he turned to me. "There is a mutilated woman here too. She is working in her garden, but he would like to bring her in to show her to you."

I implored him to give Chikwandum some excuse. I couldn't stand sight of a similarly treated woman and I had, indeed, developed a definite dislike of this smiling chief in his spotless ducks. Yet as the D.C. gave the mutilated one a florin—a child knotted it for him into a corner of his garment—and we walked back to breakfast, I pulled myself together and tried to reason the matter out. My fierce opinion was that the Bemba and kindred Central African tribes should be left in their natural state, ruled by their own chiefs; but at my first sight of what their rough justice meant I immediately recoiled from these folk I had learnt to love. My viewpoint, I realised, was entirely illogical. I asked the D.C. hopefully, "But he is an old man, and those savage days are gone. The present Chitimukulu wouldn't practice mutilation?"

"No, because he is afraid of us. Left to himself I wouldn't trust him."

"But . . ." I stopped and then walked on very fast. Africa was full of buts.

## VIII

The next morning my sympathies were again entirely with the Bemba. Approaching the village where we were to have breakfast we came across a Catholic school where a very fat native in white shorts and shirt and a red fez was haranguing some twenty-five apathetic children. When we walked up to him the school was sitting cross-legged on the ground while he chalked figures on a blackboard slung against a tree; but so soon as he saw the D.C., he clapped

his hands, said " 'Shun!'" in a parade-ground voice and hustled his charges to an open space. "Gymnastics," he chanted, "show the great *Bwana* your gymnastics."

Obediently the infants did Swedish drill, formed fours, ran round in complicated formation. They were rather good at these exercises—they liked them. Alas, the D.C. had been having a quiet squint at the blackboard and was unimpressed. "I'd like to see their arithmetic."

The fat boy remonstrated. This was the hour for gymnastics; he couldn't alter the schedule.

The D.C. was adamant. " *Arithmetic*, I said."

Back trooped the school, sat down once more, licked their slates with their tongues and looked expectant.

"Put down seven, then five, then two; then add them together," said the D.C.

A shocking amount of cribbing went on. In the end one child out of the lot had two figures right and it was clear that none of them knew the meaning of addition.

The D.C. began once more, but this time he asked the teacher to chalk the figures on the blackboard with the correct plus sign between them. Several mothers who were interestedly watching the progress of their progeny nodded delightedly when they saw the fat boy's discomfiture, for even he had no idea of addition.

"What standard is this?"

The reply was glib—too glib. "Sub-standard A, sah. See the gymnastics, sah, very good, very clever."

"Rubbish, they can do those anywhere. I want to see what they're learning."

In a burst of confidence the fat one confessed they were learning singing. The twenty-five burst into a shrill, monotonous chant at the end of which their master said, "Very hard school this, sah. Wicked Scots Christians at the other end of the village taking children away."

We heard the "wicked Scots Christians" long before we reached them, for they too were singing, and their song took

me back to the days of my youth and the Barclay Church in Edinburgh, because it was clearly definable as "*Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks.*" There were a paltry eighteen pupils here, and the master was thin instead of fat, and the school building had no roof to it, but competition with the Catholics was keen as mustard, and the thin boy informed us that his mission would eventually oust the White Fathers or die in the attempt.

And there they were. Sudetenland wasn't in it for sheer, unmitigated hatred between two sects. The scattered villages within a hundred mile radius had no school of any sort—this village had two.

We walked on to Musungu, and thought that as the name meant "care-taker" it was singularly inappropriate, since this was the place from which the honey-beer-loving headman had been deposed. It contained several fat-tailed sheep, shown off with much pride, and an enormous collection of village belles who pranced excitedly before us; but the village itself showed clear signs of neglect and the older people looked careworn and sad.

That afternoon, having walked about eighteen miles, we came to Kasunga Njela ("He who plays on the native piano"), and to the most beautiful camp we had yet experienced, as it was perched on a hill-top and from it we could see the distant hills we should have to cross before reaching paradise. From here the D.C. planned to follow the route supposedly taken by that early Portuguese explorer, Dr. Francisco José Maria de Lacerda e Almeida, towards the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

To Dr. de Lacerda and his companions the journey had been arduous indeed; to us, well over a hundred years later, it would be simple. That evening I read of de Lacerda and his sufferings, and of that miserable priest Pinto who managed to make a glorious hash of the expedition after

<sup>1</sup> See *Lacerda's Journey to Cazembe*, John Murray, 1873, and *O Muato Cazembe*, Lisbon, Imprensa Nacional, 1854.

his death, and tried to imagine the hardships they must have endured; but in the midst of my reading a messenger who had chased us all the way from Mpika wheeled his *jinga* into camp. He had news, thrilling news! The elephant had raided Mpika cemetery and trampled on the grave of *Bwana Ross*.

Now if one had heard such a thing in England one would have shrugged it away as a native yarn. But we were in the heart of Africa and on the fringe of a noted elephant district and we had been entirely surrounded by Africans for several days. We knew the native belief, that the elephant always comes back to the man he has killed, and from the clerk's letter to the D.C. we discovered that although the elephant had not actually raided the cemetery they had assuredly visited Mpika and left definite traces of their presence. It was queer, decidedly queer. Why should the elephant suddenly descend on Mpika, a place they had left severely alone of late years, a brief few weeks after *Bwana Ross*'s burial there?

Probably the visitation was pure coincidence but to me at least, as I crouched over the camp fire, it didn't seem quite that.

Maybe I didn't want it to seem that.



## CHAPTER IX

# THE ELEPHANT CAME THIS WAY

### I

WITH my mind full of de Lacerda and elephant I tramped through the early morning to Mpalamamba which, so far as the D.C. could determine by questioning, meant "like a snake's laughter." The sun shone brilliantly, the far hills were coming nearer, the villages were growing fewer and smaller, the path the Portuguese had taken was narrow and full of twists.

"The path no white woman has ever trod," said the D.C. mockingly but with truth, for in spite of the most searching inquiries both then and later we were unable to trace any white woman who had made our journey through the hills. Mademoiselle and I felt rather perky over this, and the thought went to my head so much that I took to my *jinga* and bowled serenely along for several miles until, lost in dreams of pioneering, I tumbled into a clump of extremely jagged papyrus and cut my bare legs in about fifteen places.

After that I walked glumly on to Shilombe, which the natives said vaguely was "just a name" and scorned the antics of Julius who was in tremendous form this morning.

My memory—and my note-book—are so crammed with incidents of *ulendo* that I am a trifle hazy on the subject, but I think it was the village of Mupila, (the rubber vine)<sup>1</sup> which impressed me by its extreme well-being. To reach it we had to cross the Kalunga river, and this was fringed by a very swampy *dambô* through which we waded almost thigh deep. It was a wretched place, full of holes and insects and pools of stagnant water, and by the time we had

<sup>1</sup> As opposed to the eastern rubber tree, unknown in Africa.

sidled across the river proper by a more than usually shaky bridge we were tired and fretty. Ahead of us lay a mile or so more of swamp but, to our glee, the headman of Mupila had sent a young army out to span it with tree-trunks. The job must have taken them hours, and immensely grateful we were for their labours as we slithered across the trees. Not that this accomplishment was a simple one to master. At any moment one might start to play the most alarming game of see-saw and be precipitated into the muddy swamp, but it was infinitely preferable to squelching through masses of stinking green weed which harboured all kinds of horrors including leeches.

When we had covered the swamp and were climbing the hill we were quite shaken by sight of the village, for instead of the usual decrepit-looking huts set on a mud-flat here were trim and newly whitewashed huts surrounded by sugar-cane, banana plants and even, wonder of wonders, a few orange trees, while the compound had very evidently been recently swept and garnished. The reason was the headman, a brisk, efficient creature who took a real pride in his home. We wished regretfully we were staying in his vicinity for the night but that, alas, was impossible as we had to push on to Butawangombi.<sup>1</sup> However, we rested thankfully beside his bananas, admired his tobacco plants and his fat-tailed sheep, patted his piccanins on the head and listened to his tales of elephant which had been raiding his gardens.

Those elephant ruined our afternoon. All day long the D.C. had raged and fulminated against the Government edict that all official messengers should wear the red fez. It was enough, he declared, to scarify any self-respecting elephant, and despite the fact we had been picking up their spoor all day we needn't expect to see any with four of these red caps in our cavalcade. It was a pity that after leaving Mupila a messenger should bicycle up behind us and pant out

<sup>1</sup> Butawangombi—a bow for the buffalo.

he had just seen four elephant at Kalunga river. Somehow the sun grew hotter and our feet more sore as we marched on in stony silence, and when we reached Butawangombi in a state bordering on exhaustion the appalling neglect visible in the village destroyed the last atom of our peace.

Probably it looked worse after the trimness of Mupila, but it certainly was a depressing sight. The thatch on the huts was hanging in wisps, a few withered mealies drooped dejectedly on their stems in the village garden, the ground was littered with ground-nut shells, decaying leaves and fragments of sugar cane, a lot of thin children and a tragic-eyed goat seemed the sole inhabitants.

Suddenly an incredible old man dashed into sight, his bark-cloth garment flapping in the wind. He was the headman. He was devastated because nobody had told him of the coming of the *Bwana* and therefore he had nothing ready, no food to offer, no men, no hospitality of any kind. But the *Bwana* must understand that lately he had had a terrible time, truly terrible! His men had gone to Luanshya and the elephant had raided his gardens, and his women were lonely and in a state of piteous fear.

He gesticulated so dramatically throughout this lengthy speech that although I could only catch one word in twenty I really felt like sitting down on the dirty ground, scattering ashes from the nearest fire on my head, and beating my breast. He was so old, and his thin body shook as though with ague, and his bark-cloth had great jagged tears in it.

Unfortunately, precious few of his excuses held even a grain of truth. News runs like wildfire in Africa, and there wasn't a man, woman or child in the district who did not know we were on *ulendo*. The books showed that a smaller percentage of men had gone to the mines than from almost any other village. There were plenty of elephant in the vicinity but no evidence that they had raided his gardens—and you can't remove traces of elephant visitation in a few days, or even weeks.

He was simply bone-lazy, and the D.C.'s experienced eye detected traces of hemp-smoking about him. Doubtless he had drowsed in the sun, putting off the evil moment of preparing for us and very probably he had hoped, with the easy optimism of his kind, that the elephant would raid us and thus save him from an awkward cross-examination. His inanition had communicated itself to his villagers, who now began to stroll up and watch the scene apathetically.

During the next half-hour I realised just how stern the D.C. could be when necessity arose. He spoke little, but his voice cut like a whip-lash. The men disappeared, suddenly excessively busy with the chopping of wood and other tasks, the women produced their grinding stones and began to grind the millet for dear life, the children scattered to right and left like black-beetles, even the goat retreated behind a hut. Before us the headman positively skimmed up the hill towards the place where we had decided to camp, and the messengers and carriers ran behind him laughing and shouting, "Ba-ta-ta! Ba-ta-ta!" which literally translated meant "Now then, Father!"

Too late Ba-ta-ta regretted his dilatoriness. Knowing full well that the D.C. would put in a most unflattering report about his conduct he helter-skeltered to and fro, tripping over the undergrowth, getting in the way of the carriers as they put up the tents, shaking his old head as he floundered among our baggage. Finally he produced the most absurd brush from the folds of his robe—it consisted of a handle and exactly three twigs—and started to sweep the floor of a funny little summer-house hut in which we were sitting until the camp was ready, enveloping us in clouds of dust. We clapped our hands at him, we shrieked, we protested in English, French and Chibemba, but Ba-ta-ta went frantically on until one of the messengers shooed him all the way back to his village much as you shoo a recalcitrant chicken.

His burst of ardour for service remained undimmed.

Foodless although he had affirmed his village was, he trotted up the hill while we were at tea, the inevitable white rooster tucked under his arm, a procession of retainers bearing bowls of fresh-ground millet following him.

Poor Ba-ta-ta. I don't think somehow he got much of a *presenti* in return for his gifts—just the bare value of the goods, nothing more, and at dinner Rufus informed us that the rooster was every bit as skinny as its master.

## II

We walked among the hills we had watched growing nearer for so many days, and the winding path which led through dense bush was the one taken by de Lacerda on his fateful journey to the lands of Cazembe. A desperate business it must have been for a man above whom the shadow of death was ever present, for here were no villages, no crude gardens where one might buy grain, but only the strident song of the honey-bird warning the wild things of the forest of the approach of man. The light was cool and green, strange creepers twined themselves around the trees, and because the elephant had originally made this path taken by the Portuguese and had used it ever since, the bush looked as though an invading army had just marched through it. The white boles of trees stripped of their bark by greedy trunks glimmered oddly on either side; every few minutes we had to scramble over branches, roots, and whole trees trampled and tossed down by the impatient beasts; where the ground was miry owing to springs we saw the imprints of huge feet. Those imprints fascinated me; they were so enormous, so deep. No need here to look for spoor—although the path was hardly ever free from it—when everything about the place proclaimed that the elephant had come this way.

The game guards picked the leaves from the undergrowth, shook the drops of moisture from them, calculated how many

hours it had been since a lord of the jungle had lumbered majestically past those leaves, spraying them with water from his second stomach, and always we walked cautiously, as quietly as possible, knowing that the elephant could tell the difference between the smell of a white man and a black. For the latter he had not much fear. Native spears seldom pierced his hide and the muzzle-loader, though annoying, did not often do him to death. With a white man, however, it behoved a bull to be careful, for the white man carried a big, double-barrelled elephant gun and generally was possessed of accurate aim.

The family life of the elephant intrigued me. The bull lumbered on by himself, scorning the cows and calves who travelled together, the babies playing and fighting among themselves while their mothers nuzzled and slapped them with their trunks, and encouraged them to imitate grown-up ways. Anyone who has hunted big game will tell you that one of the most enchanting occupations is to lie hidden on an ant-hill watching the calves solemnly copying their mama's habits. For myself, I found a strange resemblance in elephantine customs to those of the average English family out for a Sunday afternoon stroll when father, scorning to be seen with a perambulator, goes ahead and his slightly harassed wife bustles along some distance behind him restricting the antics of her young.

Very wise they were, too, these great and noble creatures, and conservative in their tastes. Not for them fresh ground and pastures new if such dire change could be avoided. They preferred to thresh up and down the same trail, the same swamps, the same *dambos* year after year. Their beat might cover a vast stretch of bush, but they seldom moved outside it, and although they made periodic excursions (as they had just done so queerly at Mpika) in search of succulent tit-bits from gardens, they returned to their own familiar country when they had stolen all there was to steal.

At least could you call it stealing? I doubt it. The

jungle belonged to the elephant first and foremost, and if he chose to help himself to foods grown by that odd and newish being called man he was scarcely to be blamed for he had, so to speak, feudal rights over his domain.

But the desolation left by a herd of elephant was a horrific sight. Sometimes it really seemed as though they had gone berserk, for we would pass a whole section of the forest uprooted, stripped, trampled. On the other hand we would follow their trail for miles where they had apparently walked doucely and in orderly fashion—I presume when their hunger had been appeased by lashings of bark. That was a thing which rather bewildered me, the strangely unsatisfying food on which these giants throve. It seemed to me unnatural that the biggest animal in the world should live on bark and grasses when smaller fry were frankly carnivorous.

For me the journey through the elephant country was by far the best part of our *ulendo*, although when we left the thick bush and started to climb the going was pretty rough. With panic at my heart I used to watch Mary's *machila* carriers leaping goat-like from rock to rock while that blessed infant slept, as usual, with her fat thumb tucked into the corner of her mouth. Behind us, as we slipped and swore and struggled up precipitous slopes came the long, steady line of carriers walking easily with their heavy loads on their heads, and my *jinga* boy (who loved me very much because I scorned the bicycle) distinguished himself by careering at break-neck speed down one side of a gully and up the other. When they could bear our slowness no longer a host of carriers would bound off the path, cut across the rocks above our heads and prance on so fast that when we caught them up they would be lying on their stomachs by a spring or small stream drinking the icy water, a habit which resulted in colic and large doses of castor-oil or salts at surgery hour.

We crossed a peculiar miniature desert studded with thorn

bushes. The sand came half-way to our knees, the glare from the sun was blinding, an abominable wind sprang out of nowhere and whipped our faces. But presently we began our rock-climbing again and the klip-springers scurried off at our approach, and an exquisite green snake insinuated itself across the shining dolomite just at my feet. I was inordinately pleased with that snake until one of the house-boys told me in a scared voice it was a green mamba—it may have been, but the natives persist in regarding the most harmless grass snake as quite deadly, and the thing had wriggled off before I could ask advice on the subject.

Our greatest diversion in the hills came from the lion-man, who excelled himself with roars and whoops and would throw down his burden without warning, climb a tree, imitate a monkey, and slither down the trunk again. There was always a "comedian" in any large party of Bemba, and he definitely held this position in our cavalcade. It was he, however, who stirred up trouble in the camp that evening.

There was a little feeling because the D.C. had not shot an elephant and the lion-man fanned the flame of resentment so adequately that a deputation of five—including himself—presented themselves at the tea-table and announced that they could not go on without some "relish" to their porridge. The D.C. was sympathetic but firm. Unless he found an elephant with sufficient ivory to make it worth his while incurring the fee he would have to pay the Government for shooting it the camp must do without relish.

The deputation retired to mutter in the background, and when our meal was over the D.C. took subtle and neat revenge. Calling the game guards he told them to bring forward the grumblers because they were to come out with him after elephant. They came reluctantly. Expressing a desire for "relish" was one thing: going out after that "relish" quite another story.

We set forth, the D.C. leading, then Mademoiselle and myself sandwiched as usual between the game guards, then the lion-man and his fellows looking very mouldy. They were armed with sticks so dry that the wood was brittle and rotten, but they very evidently thought such weapons better than nothing. We struck elephant spoor about half a mile away. We followed it and we followed it, but the lords of the jungle knew a trick worth two of ours and were always a bit ahead of us. They had also most kindly done their destruction act, and we crawled laboriously under and over tree trunks, prickly branches and masses of twigs. And still we went on. The sun had set by the time we reached a wide *dambo* and climbed an ant-hill to spy the land. As we did so a duiker broke cover and went like a streak straight past our noses, an event which shattered the last of the lion-man's never very prominent courage, and he promptly swarmed up a small tree atop the ant-hill and crouched there.

But we had no eyes for him. Was that, or was it not, an elephant's hindquarters showing at the far end of the *dambo*? The guards nodded and grinned. The D.C. whispered, "You stay here. If I wound him he'll probably come back this way and you'll have to head him off." With hardly a sound he and the guards slid down the slope and away.

Mademoiselle and I grinned at each other a trifle feebly. Our four friends with the rotten sticks weren't good company and the lion-man was frankly impossible. We waited and waited, always scanning the waving grass for a glimpse of the D.C.'s hat and then, perched on an ant-hill in the middle of darkest Africa, we opened the most ridiculous argument about what we should do if the wounded elephant did charge our way. Mademoiselle had a shot-gun, I had no weapon of any kind. "I shall shoot," she announced grandly, "and if I don't get him then you will have to take the boys and chase him."

I replied heatedly that if she attempted to use a shot-gun on a wounded rogue elephant I'd never speak to her again, and that if she thought I was going to play tig with him unarmed round an ant-hill she was mistaken.

She grew more agitated. What was the shot-gun for? She might live to be a hundred and one and never have such a chance again. Of course she would shoot!

I implored her to desist and suggested wildly that when the rogue charged along we should all make a concerted dash in his direction.

At this the lion-man gave such a howl that we nearly jumped out of our skins. He had only discovered the glow of our camp-fire from his tree-top. We spoke to him severely in several languages; none of which he understood, and went back to our muttons. We argued, and we argued, and the quick dusk fell bringing an atrociously heavy dew with it, and the *dambo* was alive with shifting shadows and still there was no sound of a distant shot.

In the end there was no elephant at all, only an irate D.C. "Why the devil didn't you go back to camp?" he said.

We stood mute. Camp was at least seven miles away, we were no bush-trackers, he *had* told us to stay where we were. Sadly we descended to the *dambo*. I took one step forward and went thigh-deep into a clammy cold swamp. Mademoiselle came behind me, seized me by the wrist and precipitated herself into water up to her waist. We waded a full mile in the dark, in silence and in anger.

Even the lion-man never mentioned the word "relish" again.

### III

The hills had extraordinary names unprintable, alas, in cold English but, with the usual wit of the Bemba, extremely amusing. We had finished with climbing and our way led through narrow passes where the rough grass was starred with tiny flowers and the bare brown caps of the

hills rose on either side. To-night we would make our last camp on the far rim of the range looking down the long valley which ran to Shiwa Ngandu.

I turned to look back at the long, snaky queue of carriers and to marvel at the blithe manner in which they had travelled through well over a hundred miles of bush, papyrus and swamp with their loads balanced so lightly on their heads, and although every bit of me longed urgently for paradise I felt sorry to think that to-morrow I should say good-bye to these men who laughed and joked, who told me of their ailments, their homes, families and customs, who had implicit trust in the goodness and justice of the white man.

Still the elephant ruled the country, but now he shared honours with another and far more dangerous creature, the buffalo, for our path was dotted with his spoor. We had our late breakfast on high, open ground where a raging wind nearly blew the bacon and eggs off the table, and walked on until mid-afternoon, when we rounded a brown shoulder and came to full view of Shiwa valley. I think at that moment we all stood stupidly, a little breathless at sight of that broad, green and peaceful land. I know that in my mind the most absurd thoughts—which had nothing whatever to do with my own feelings—chased one another at random. There was what Churchill called "*The River War*"; there was the arrogant thrust of Mr. Rhodes; there was the edict that Afrikaans was a language on a par with English in the Union of South Africa; there were the apes in hell of the Copper Belt and the unspoilt tribes who dwelt in places comparatively unknown to the white man—in short, I thought of Africa. Hitherto it had not been my right to speak from my own mind about this vast continent which slumbered fitfully under a tropic sun. Now that I had lived with her, laughed with her, cried with her for ever so short a space I knew that I was entitled, in an infinitesimal way, to think over her many problems by myself.

I thought; but I didn't tell my thoughts. If I had done so either the D.C. or the lion-man would rightly have turned and rent me. I knew so little: they knew so much.

## IV

Mrs. D.C. didn't like our proposed camp-site. She preferred a place farther up the mountain-side, and though we argued strenuously about the matter she remained adamant and eventually we left her to supervise the servants and went off hunting. As I followed the D.C. I cogitated once more on the quickness with which tempers frayed in this climate. We were all physically fit from open-air living; we were agreed that it had been a glorious *ulendo* and that this camping in remote places was a fine game; yet we became unnecessarily agitated over the slightest thing and waxed temperamental about some tiny point which would never have worried us in another country. It didn't really matter to any of us *where* we camped, but the same desire for futile argument experienced by Mademoiselle and myself on the ant-hill sprang up fully armed upon the least provocation.

"It's the altitude," said the D.C. gloomily, but the next minute he cheered up because we came to buffalo spoor and just ahead of us was a dense, small wood.

This, apparently, was the sort of place where the buffalo liked to lurk during the daytime, so we decided to explore it. I was a shade dubious. The game guards were helping with the camp and I happened to know that a year or two back the D.C. had been badly gored by a charging buffalo. I also knew that this animal is the only one who, on occasion, charges without the shadow of a reason. So I hovered beside the tangle of prickly undergrowth fringing the wood until a fierce whisper reached me, "Come on, and for the Lord's sake *keep quiet.*"

Quiet, forsooth! Every time my mosquito-booted foot

descended the whole wood resounded with cracklings, and how the D.C. managed to tread so softly over treacherous stuff which promised foothold but proved itself quagmire I couldn't make out. At each step I found myself up to my ankles in bog with strong and evil-smelling creepers coiled tightly round my body, but I was developing some slight technique in dealing with these things when I stepped firmly and lingeringly on a nest of black ants. At that instant the D.C. stopped and peered intently through the dimness to a black pool. Perforce I stopped also and was at once assailed by indescribable torture. The ants were the large kind with pincers and they were exceedingly angry. I tugged at my garments, I shook myself, I plucked handfuls of the pests from my arms and legs, but their savage nips grew in fury and the whole of my body was invaded by pain. I didn't care if every buffalo in Africa was in that wood—I was getting out of it. "Ants!" I jogged the D.C. in the back.

He didn't even turn his head, but hissed, "Shut up!"

Wildly I thought of the *Bwana*'s advice. "If you're bitten by ants the only thing to do is to strip all your clothes off at once." How could I undress in this ghastly wood alone with the D.C. and goodness knew how much game? A series of incredible nips on my stomach drove me mad. I turned and fled, crashing through the undergrowth with a noise enough to wake the dead and ran all the way to camp to find the place swarming with carriers and my tent only in process of being put up. Clutching myself violently as the ants redoubled their attack I hopped, and cursed, and shrieked, while Mary cheered me and Mrs. D.C. and Mademoiselle laughed immoderately. "Hurry up!" I implored the messengers, but it seemed an eternity before they had finished fiddling with my tent-ropes and I could rush inside this haven.

I killed well over a hundred and fifty ants grimly and with malice. I dabbed the innumerable red punctures on my

body with cold cream. I yelled for Sefarino and flung my discarded clothes through the tent-flap at his innocent head. I emerged, dressed, sane again, and filled with cold rage to find the D.C. eating his third egg. He said placidly, "And there weren't any buffalo there after all."

I seethed, and sat down gingerly.

He lifted his head and looked around until his gaze rested on my tent, which was set farthest up the hillside. "You're bang on the elephant path," he remarked comfortably. "Oh, well, if they come in the middle of the night just let me know."

If even one of those immense feet descended on a small tent its occupant would never be able to let anybody know anything ever again. I said so. He grinned. I glared, devoured a plate of eggs and bacon, felt better and was completely restored to peace by the arrival of a messenger (who had bicycled on into Shiwa the day before) bearing a note and a tin of cigarettes for me.

Chikwandu's naïve acceptance of forty-nine cigarettes instead of one had run me short, and for the past twenty-four hours I had not smoked. Maybe, I thought as I lit my cigarette, that was the explanation of my ill-humour, and registered a vow (quickly forgotten) to cut down my smoking in future as it was a terrible thing to allow tobacco to gain an ascendancy over you. Conscious of virtue I beamed on the D.C. and opened the note sent me by Shem.

It was a delicious effort. It ran:

Heow's Sto8es,

MAMA E. BIGLAND.

please receive H/W 1 tin 50s pall Mall Cigs.  
We have no S.R.V. Cigs. left again in Sto8es 1  
tin pall Mall in stock.

Thank you.

Your honest boy

SHEM

The "honest boy" touched me to the heart. I also liked the H/W for herewith, the odd scattering of capital letters and the amazing presence of a figure eight in the word stores. Best of all was the delicate hint that while he had (as usual) run out of cheap cigarettes he yet had another tin of Pall Mall in stock which would, presumably, be set aside until my return. Mr. Heow's correct name happened to be Thom, but such minor details of spelling worried Shem not one whit.

The messenger, however, had brought another note for Mrs. D.C., in which the *Mama* at Shiwa said she would send the lorry to meet us on the morrow on the Kasakalabwe road. We spoke with one voice: we were going to walk into paradise and the mere idea of a lorry affronted us. So valiant were we that a fresh messenger was hauled up and given instructions to mount his *jinga* at dawn and ride hell-for-leather down the valley in order to stop this monstrous lorry-business.

We then turned our attention to the goat. This was the tragic-eyed animal of Ba-ta-ta and had trotted obediently behind us on a long rope. We had grown quite attached to the creature, but now, alas, his hour had come, as he must provide "relish" for the carriers on this last night in camp. Alive he had cost three and sixpence: dead he pervaded the camp to such an extent that you would have imagined there were at least eight goats about the place somewhere. Under the guidance of the head messenger, Kalanjunga, Dismus carved his poor body into innumerable pieces, and after surgery I crashed along to the kitchen with a lantern to watch the doling out of poor Billy. The lion-man, I noticed, was first of the nine men chosen from the various sections of the camp, and he had what was considered as the pick of the sections, a perfectly loathsome collection of tripe and other innards, for the more highly tasting meat is the more does the native value his "relish." Kalanjunga reserved the head for the messengers and game guards,

assuring me with much rubbing of his tummy that the brains, the cheeks and especially the eyes were delicious. Rather surprisingly there was no quarrelling over the division of Billy and I stayed, ignoring the appalling smell of the carcase, until the last joint was handed out. There was, however, a fierce altercation as to who should have the skin, for this could be put to a strange variety of uses. You could drape yourself in it on these chilly winter nights, you could make a cover for the family bed or garments for your children out of it, you could cut it up and cobble it into water-bags. The lion-man won it in the end—he won most things.

After dinner we sat beside the huge fire, our nostrils still tilliated by the pungent aroma of the defunct William, portions of whom were being frizzled over nine camp fires. Towards ten o'clock the usual nightly visitation started, dim figures appearing from the shadows beyond the fire to squat down on the far side of the leaping flames. There they would sit, their unwinking gaze fixed steadfastly on our faces and when the D.C., rattled by their presence, would shout to them to go until we had retired to our tents, they would drift sadly away only to slip back within a few moments.

Certainly their stares were slightly irritating, but personally I liked this sharing of warmth with those who had borne our burdens through the heat of the day, and also I enjoyed their firm conviction that our fire, because it was made and stoked for the white man, was better than the nine which flickered in the distance.

To-night we were too sleepy to protest against our visitors. We prodded each other into wakefulness, picked up our respective lamps and made for the tents.

I undressed, did my little chores which consisted of removing live-stock from the canvas (latterly I had bravely scorned the D.C.'s aid in this task), ensuring that my water-bottle was filled and making certain that the safety-catch was on my gun; then I threw back the flap and looked

across to the fire and the dark humps of the sleeping natives beyond it. Climbing into bed I reflected that this was the last time I should sleep in the bush, the last time I should see the Southern Cross from my bath, or take surgery, or feel security because the Bemba lay so close to my tent. To-morrow I should leave the "path no white woman ever trod," the memory of de Lacerda and the bare-topped hills. It would, I thought, be a fitting climax to *ulendo* if an elephantine foot crashed on to my bed during the night, but I could not keep my thoughts on elephant—they strayed to Shiwa.

To-morrow I should be again in paradise.



## CHAPTER X

### PARADISE REVISITED

#### I

WE pounded down the valley as if the devil himself followed us. We had loved *ulendo*—oh, yes, we had loved it—but now our one ambition was to reach Shiwa Ngandu as soon as possible.

We had forgotten, of course, about the Manshia. Towards ten o'clock we came to a vast swamp through which we splashed happily, pointing out to each other the distant landmarks which showed the Kasakalabwe road. There was the hut beside the white clay pits, and there the *dambos* where the buck came down to feed of an evening, and there the brown hump of Chitané hill. All of a sudden the swamp came to an abrupt end, and before us the river swirled past on its way to Shiwa lake. We regarded it with something akin to terror. It was wholly unlike the other rivers we had crossed on our journey and it was not, could not be, the stream in which I had swum so happily near the enchanted pool. It was very wide and very angry and very deep, and its waters boiled and frothed. I bent down and put my arm elbow-deep into it. So low was the temperature that the arm remained numb for several minutes.

“You’ll have to be carried,” announced the D.C., and signed to a game guard to cross. The wretched man levered himself off the high bank and went up to his neck. Struggling against the current he moved upstream trying to find a shallower place, and as he went he beat the palms of his hands against the surface of the water.

“Why is he doing that?”

“Oh, just to scare off the crocs.”

We waded on the edge of the swamp while the game guard

wandered up and down testing depths and seeking for the easiest crossing. His khaki tunic was a balloon about this throat, but somehow he reached the far bank at last, then turned and waded back to us. He was a depressing sight. We shivered, looked doubtfully at the D.C., and said with one accord that we thought we would feel better fitted to cope with the Manshia after breakfast, that the water would then be warmer, that in any case we would arrive too early at Shiwa if we crossed now.

I don't think he was any keener on the Manshia than we were, for he accepted our feeble excuses and we trailed back through the swamps to a small clearing, and Dismus and Rufus began to bustle round with table-cloths and frying-pans. We talked no more of landmarks. We turned our deck chairs firmly away from Shiwa view and grew hilarious over the taking of photographs. We took the house-boys, each holding an implement denoting his trade except poor Sefarino, who protested he could not hold the collapsible bath. Dismus waved the frying-pan, Rufus held a plate of oranges, Julius—who had no right to be in the picture at all—proudly seized a kettle. We took my carriers, one with the tin box on his head, the other balancing the typewriter from two fingers. We took Mary, and Mary's *machila*, and the game guards, and Kalenjunga standing at the salute. We took every photograph we could think of, and all the time we knew our hilarity was spurious and that the spectre of the Manshia lurked in the background of our minds.

We lingered over a colossal meal. We spoke at random of the Savoy Hotel, of hunting in England, of things remote from Central Africa, but presently our voices died and we glanced a little furtively at each other and said we might as well finish the bread, butter and guava jelly as there was no point in carrying nearly empty jars to Shiwa.

We didn't make a move until the carriers literally pulled our chairs from under us, and then we minced through the swamp in silence. On the bank Kalenjunga and his mate

linked arms, stooped down and invited me to climb on to their shoulders. My self-control fled and I announced passionately that crocodiles or no crocodiles I was going to wade.

"Do," said the D.C. grimly. "I'll take a photograph of you," and he surged out into mid-stream holding camera and glasses high above his head. The current tore at his tunic, exposing a large portion of chest and stomach, whereat Mrs. D.C. and I laughed so much that we flopped into the water without fear. We didn't laugh long. The river-bed was shifting sand into which we alternately sank and slithered, and even with the messengers holding our hands to guide us we felt the icy water lapping our chins. The folly of this crossing right on top of my enormous breakfast suddenly struck me and wild thoughts of death assailed me, and before I reached the far bank I should positively have welcomed a crocodile. Worst of all, the figure of the governess appeared on the slope by the clay pits and she was very obviously enjoying our agonies.

Dripping wet from head to foot we clambered up the bank, wrung out our skirts and marched on. In the first bravado of our landing we ignored the clamminess of our garments. We had journeyed with the elephant, we had used "the path no white woman ever trod," we were walking into paradise.

But slap, slap went our soaking skirts and shirts, and the elephant were far behind us, and why the devil we had ever refused the *Mama*'s offer of a lorry we didn't know.

The governess, who was dancing a jig in the middle of the road when we pounded up to that haven, greeted us with enthusiasm. "We've left three *jingas* round the corner."

We sniffed and strode on, still strong in our desire to walk home.

The *jingas*, in usual African fashion, formed a heap in the middle of the road, over which Sondashi stood guard. "No *jingas*?" he shook his head sorrowfully. "Six miles to the house, *Mama*."

We were tired out, exceedingly wet, scratched from feet to thighs and finger-tips to shoulders; but we remained stubborn. "Six miles?" we said, "but that's a mere nothing!"

So we walked, and we walked. Our clothes dried and stood out stiffly from our persons, the dust choked us, the Kasakalabwe road, normally an affair of loops and twists, seemed to stretch straight, white and endless before us. An eternity later we espied the family strolling indolently to meet us. They looked very cool, very calm, and they had brought the donkeys with them, and they said how late we should be for lunch. Grimly we set Mary on one of the donkeys and swung to the right down the uneven path which led to the cattle kraals. I had reached the stage of walking with my gaze fixed on the ground when the barking of Kim caused me to lift my head and there, sweet and shining beneath the midday sun, lay the lake.

My tiredness vanished and I stepped on lightly past the lime and eucalyptus groves, past my "honest boy," Shem, who stood clapping his hands in his doorway, past the villagers who bobbed in the dust and said, "*Mapoleni, Mama! Mapoleni!*" up to the house where a white-clad figure moved along the shadowy passage and white teeth flashed in a dark face.

"*Mama, Mama, welcome home!*"

I said, "Oh, James, I'm so tired."

He led me to my room. Hot water awaited me, and orange juice in a tall glass, and bowls of glowing petunias.

Half an hour later I sat in the easy chair while James rubbed my aching feet and stared out at the line of sapphire beyond the cypress avenue. Return to paradise was wonderful indeed.

## II

Mulemfwe scrutinised me thoroughly and made a long speech, translated by the *Bwana*, in which he said that he was most thankful I had survived the perils of my many

journeyings, but thought I looked much thinner. "Fattening," he announced judiciously, "is what she wants."

I turned a deaf ear to that last remark, smirked over the reference to my supposed loss in weight, and asked how his wives, children and grandchildren were. One or two of these, it appeared, were a shade troublesome, but he was far more interested in the new bridge and a road he was making. "And how long will it take you to make your book?" he queried suddenly.

A cloud obscured the sun. Hastily I trotted homewards, evaded the attentions of Cleo as I picked a basketful of tangerines, gained my room and sat down before the typewriter.

Five minutes later the *Mama* put her head round the door. "They're waiting for you to go to Timbe."

"I can't. I've got to work."

"Rubbish. You know perfectly well you eat a tangerine to every line, and all the keys get sticky, and . . ."

I said, "Go away!"

She laughed softly. "Oh, my!" she said.

I ripped the paper out of the machine, reached for my hat and went to Timbe.

Where a month ago men had been felling trees and measuring up the sizes of the three classrooms a noble building reared itself, while down in the valley by the river the two "boarding-houses" were practically finished. Nelson rushed forward, his smile stretching from ear to ear, and escorted me over the school. Sam beamed, and wrote numbers on his legs for my amusement; the other workers grinned at me. "*È mukwai!*!" they exclaimed wisely when the *Bwana* told them I had been to the Copper Belt, and Nelson cocked one eyebrow. "Not good for our people, the mines."

I looked at these wiry men who worked with such energy and I thought of the man in Mufulira hospital who lay propped on pillows dying of pneumonia. "No, not altogether good."

Why did I qualify my remark? I could not reason it out



PARADISE



for myself, let alone explain why I had done so. I only knew in my mind that since the white man had brought the desire for advancement to the native he had perforce to go on extending that advancement, and although I had been horrified by many things during my trip south what I had seen had made me realise that if only the white man would apply himself whole-heartedly to native problems the security promised by regular industrial labour might yet prove the salvation of the black man.

But such salvation was a very long way off, and here in paradise was contentment and the rare bond of loyalty. I sat on the unfinished doorstep of the school and listened dreamily to Nelson's excited chatter and gazed down on the lake. Some day I should come back to Shiwa Ngandu and find that the hospital had been built in the valley, and the Church on the far hill-side. James and his cousin would be running their tea-shop, the *Mama*'s beans would be cropping richly, the sheep would be cured of mysterious diseases. For this was one of the few places in Africa where men worked steadily and surely towards a certain goal.

"Come along," said the *Bwana*. "We'll go and have a look at the new bridge."

We packed into the lorry cab, made our usual silly joke about "*la vie intime*," and rattled off to the Kasama road. The bridge was beautiful, so nearly completed that we actually drove over it, and Mulemfwe was busily exhorting a group of piccanins to hurry up with their loads of clay. But somehow the Manshia had lost its attraction for me and I sat on a boulder and stared vacantly around me until the *Bwana* grinned, "Looking for Temperature?"

I grinned back—and spent the rest of the day in the enchanted pool.

### III

Saturday afternoon was *fiesta* time—there was another jumble sale. All the things were heaped in baskets labelled

“a penny,” or “a *tikki*,” or “sixpence” inside the little office down in the village, and a very harassed Shem was in charge of them. He had bolted and barricaded the door, outside which about a hundred people clamoured furiously, but all his efforts could not debar lithe black forms from slithering in through the open window.

Pandemonium reigned. Strangely enough the *capitaos* were the worst offenders, and I saw Sam seizing a whole armful of clothing which he proceeded to try on the various members of his family, while Nelson so far forgot his dignity as to caper madly down the path with a pair of corsets tucked under his arm. As soon as Shem opened the door an inch a dozen struggling figures stormed it and there was much fumbling in skin purses for money. I bought two frocks for a couple of wistful-eyed piccanins who stood, stark naked, beside me; but by the time I emerged from the press with my booty they had disappeared and the next moment I was surrounded by eager parents who offered me whole shillings if I would part with the garments. Indeed, the exchanging of purchases which went on was bewildering, and two *capitaos* had a free fight over a pair of the younger daughter’s jodhpurs, which ended in their retaining one leg each. In vain did the exhausted Shem call for order and the elder daughter, who was helping to sell the goods, thump her customers on the back. A jumble sale in Shiwa was a great and glorious event at which the best man won.

The wives did little buying. They squatted on the outskirts of the crowd and let their men-folk do the work, and I saw Leonard Billy’s horrid old father stuff two brocade curtains up his shirt in case someone wrested them from him, while Maké strutted about with a woman’s evening cloak draped round his square shoulders. I sat down in the ditch, overcome by heat, noise and the piercing smell of castor-oil, and watched Aggeness hobbling painfully along in a pair of the governess’s silver slippers. These were narrow, high-heeled, and at least three sizes too small, but

Aggeness had somehow squeezed her broad bare feet into them and was determined to wear them at all costs. Together we walked up the steep hill to the house, Aggeness giggling and squeaking alternately, and on the way we met Mrs. Nelson prancing along proudly with the corsets on over her print dress.

That evening the children of the house gave a sundowner party in celebration of a birthday, and Aggeness and one of the house-boys were called forth to dance to the accordion. Off came the silver slippers and so exquisitely did those brown feet move that I implored her afterwards never to wear shoes again. But her mouth quivered like a hurt child's, and she stroked the slippers lovingly. They were so beautiful; she just had to wear them.

## IV

The days slid past with frightening rapidity. There was so much I wanted to do; so little time in which to do it. The D.C. and his family departed on their long trek back to Mpika and I knew a pang when I watched the carriers line up with their loads for I too wanted to march with them, but fortunately our parting was not so sorrowful as it might have been, because at the last moment Sefarino remembered he had got the washing mixed, unpacked a tin box of intimate garments in the middle of the path and tore back to me brandishing something aloft. "Your nightie-gown, *Mama!*"

Later that day we drove along the Kasakalabwe road and bumped down to the place where the Manshia flowed into Shiwa lake. There was a tiny hut set on stilts there which had been built so that a watch might be kept for the leopard who nosed around the cattle kraals, and we sat on its steps as dusk swept down on the shimmering water and the egrets flew home to a little hillock beside the tall reeds. Suddenly there was a mighty whirr of wings and about forty guinea-fowl skimmed our heads and came down to feed

beside us. All the lakeside birds were strictly preserved by the *Bwana* and they seemed to know no harm could come to them for they showed no fear of us.

The enchanting colours of lake and sky disappeared abruptly and night descended just as though some unseen person had rung down a curtain before a stage. From far up the river came the soft splash of the paddles and the low chanting of the boys. We had forgotten the lantern, so we switched on the car headlights to guide the canoes up the reedy creek, for the children had gone the first lap of *ulendo* with the D.C. brigade. They arrived full of excitement, one of them holding a particularly revolting praying mantis tenderly in her hand. "*Mama* Bigland, you've got to take photographs *all* to-morrow!"

"Who said so?"

"The boys. You've got to take Sondashie and Livingstone and George and Mrs. George and the baby and James and Mrs. James and their baby and . . ."

"If you don't remove that appalling insect from my lap I shan't take any of them."

But I did. The following afternoon James knocked on the door of my room. He was arrayed in a dinner-jacket and looked amazingly grand. "We are all ready, *Mama*."

The compound was seething with movement. Mrs. George was attiring her infant in a bright pink frock and sunbonnet, Livingstone was prinking before a minute mirror stuck on the wall of his hut, two of the wash-boys were having a fierce argument as to who should wear the one hat they possessed between them. All the wives and children, about thirty altogether, crowded round me demanding to be taken first, but James was firm. "Now, *Mama*, this is the important thing. I want the special photograph of myself, my wife and my child. I shall stand holding the baby behind the chair in which she sits. See, here is the photograph of my other wife and child, I want it just like this, and then you will ask the man in England to make it

big, ever so big, and put it in a gold frame and send it out to me."

James had clearly missed his vocation. He ought to have been in one of those seaside photographic establishments where customers are posed against cardboard boats or with their heads sticking out of lifebuoys. He hauled forward a hard chair and beckoned his wife, who simpered towards me clad in a yellow *broderie anglaise* frock, a floppy hat, and Aggeness's silver shoes, borrowed for the occasion. "I say," the younger child announced in a piercing treble, "that's not the same Mrs. James there was three months ago."

I blushed. Considering that the small James was three years old it seemed rather a desperate remark, but James was unperturbed. "Now if you will please give me two cigarettes, *Mama*, my wife will smoke one and I the other. Then we shall look just like the white people."

I struck at the cigarettes. I even hinted that Mrs. James would be ever so much more attractive in her ordinary print slip, but this horrifying idea was howled down by everybody. So the James family, their bodies held stiffly, their dark faces completely blank, posed in the blinding sunlight among the acclamations of their friends. "Now one of my wife and myself," said James. "And now one of myself alone."

Oh, yes, it was James's afternoon.

Then all the others had to be taken, and they kept dragging in babies, sewing-machines, *jingas* and even a goat to add to the effect of each picture, while hens and tame guineafowl meandered at will right across the foreground. Hot and distracted I struggled with the camera, aided by the younger child's shrill instructions in Chibemba. Finally the last group was dismissed and I sat down under a tree and ate a tangerine.

"Oh, *Mama*," said James in an awe-struck voice. "You have forgotten George."

I yelled for him imperiously. There was no reply. A crowd besieged his hut and his wife ran to and fro in a state

of dither. At last he dashed into view, an astonishing figure in a pink shirt, bow tie, blue cotton trousers and a white felt hat. The other boys fell on him, dragged him round the corner, and clothed him in his best navy suiting plus the scarlet ostrich feather buttonhole. "Here I am, *Mama*," he trotted up to me, "just a little late."

Even then James was not satisfied. He had to retie George's tie, and cockle the sun-bonnet on tiny George's head, and make Mrs. George sit with her bare feet daintily crossed before her.

Walking up from the compound a shadow fell on the path and a disgusting squirt of tannic acid fell on my right arm. "*Mama*, all my little brothers and sisters still wait to be photographed."

Leonard Billy once more. "I haven't any films left."

He followed me up to the house and leant outside my windows looking wistful all afternoon. Only when Cleo, searching for sustenance, attacked his skinny ankles, did he vanish. It was the only time I ever felt a tenderness for that evil bird.

James came in to announce tea. "There are visitors and they are playing tennis. You do not play that stupid game, do you, *Mama*? So silly, knocking a little white ball about."

Not for the first time I was acutely conscious of the scorn in which the Bemba held the white man's relaxations.

"The hunter has brought in a roan antelope," he went on. "Would you like to see it being weighed?"

The hunter was a wiry little man, quite illiterate, but possessed of great cunning. Formerly he had received a settled wage each week, but most mysteriously the amount of game he brought in had grown less and less until the *Mama* had told him that in future he would be paid one penny three farthings per pound on all meat produced. The hunter was cross—but buck of various kinds now appeared with startling regularity. He was up to every trick, that little man. How he knew the exact number of pennies due

to him was incomprehensible, since he could neither read nor count, but know he did to the last farthing and on this particular afternoon he was having a fine game with George over the weighing of the antelope. This was weighed just as he brought it in, and was then skinned and jointed, so the wily hunter simply popped the empty hide on the scales again and argued loud and long that this weight must be added to the previous amount already jotted down.

I watched negotiations for half an hour and came away feeling he was slightly too clever for poor George, who was getting completely flummoxed at the astonishing reappearance of various of the buck's innards on the scales.

“To-morrow,” said James, “we will take our last expedition.”

A gloomy thought. To get away from it I walked up the valley by the flume to the dam, where the old diviner sat rattling his bones. “*Mapoleni, Mama!*” he greeted me, and I gave him a cigarette. In peace we sat under a raffia palm watching the tumbling river as the sun set blood-red behind Chitané hill, and every now and again he would smile at me and nod his greying head. He was very ancient, he turned his face against the strange ways of the white man, he was full of age-old dark knowledge; but he was a good companion.

## v

Once more James and I pedalled solemnly on our *jingas* across the aerodrome, visited Paul and gave him messages from his “brothers in the mines,” came back by Mulemfwe’s hut, where he sat cross-legged by his evening fire. “Tell her,” he asked James, “not to forget us when she is home in England. Tell her to ask the big Government there to help the black people here, to give our tribesmen work, to help us to live good lives. Tell her to say to them that we love them and are loyal, but that we want no Germans in Africa.”

He took a gargantuan pinch of snuff and regarded me inquiringly.

I couldn't look him straight in the eye, this grand old man. When I reached home there would have been at least five major European crises, and nobody would be in the least interested in the tribes of Central Africa. "When we've settled European troubles," they would say fretfully, refusing to see the tragedy which threatened to overtake the black men in remote districts under British rule, the tragedy which would come when these men could no longer keep their faith in the Empire. We had annexed their countries: it seemed to me we had a terrible responsibility towards them.

"I know," said Mulemfwe slowly, "they want to give back Tanganyika to that German with the funny name."

Mulemfwe, no less than Cecil John Rhodes, dreamed of the United States of Africa.

I crouched staring into the fire, remembering the men who had given their lives to this huge continent, Baring, Gordon, Livingstone, Rhodes, hundreds of lesser-known men who had laboured year after year under appalling conditions to bring order and a modicum of security to the natives. And now? I was every bit as bad as those at home who ignored Africa. I pushed her into the background of my mind and talked at length of the new school, and the proposed hospital, and the doctor who was coming out in the autumn.

Mulemfwe nodded gravely. "Yes, we are happy here. Elsewhere they are not happy."

I pedalled homeward with James thinking over his words. Not for Mulemfwe the easy ways of modern civilisation, the surface delights of the younger native in gay clothes, and strange drinks, and cinemas and kindred pastimes. He was made of sterner stuff and he had the larger vision. When the Government, for some unaccountable reason, had published news of the abdication of Edward VIII but omitted

to give any details of this event, and the *Bwana* had explained the situation to Mulemfwe he had said, "You mean, *Bwana*, that he left all of us for that?"

Mulemfwe was, I always think, the most Imperialistic Imperialist I had ever met.

## VI

To mark my last Saturday evening there was to be a dance in the house compound, a most elegant affair with a *tikki* charge for admission, a band including accordions as well as drums and native pianos, and beer. Refreshments were to consist of rice, meat, scones and tea, all ingredients being bought from the house store-room. This was rather a complicated arrangement, as I offered to provide the food and paid the little bill, amounting to seventeen and fourpence (including a whole goat), only to have the money courteously returned to me because it was thought better in the end to keep to the idea of a "subscription" dance.

"Very nice affairs, subscription dances," said James. I smiled; I knew a chief was going to be there and just wondered how much guile the Bemba independence concealed. Very probably if they were spending their own *tikkis* there would be a grand opportunity for consuming vast quantities of beer.

James was chief caterer, organiser and M.C., so rushed about all day very harassed and the whole household caught the fever with the result that our meals were sketchy affairs and rooms went undusted. In mid-afternoon there was a panic because the goat had not yet arrived, and after high words with George James marched down to the compound and began a ruthless slaughter of scrawny fowls. I followed, to see the fun, and for the *n*th time stood enraptured before his kitchen hut which bore in black-lettering the caption, "Jamesi Maxwelli, Head-Boy, His Kitchen." People were busily hanging flags and lanterns, sweeping the compound,

carrying smouldering wood for fires. It was very evidently going to be a fine party.

"We won't go down until about nine," said the *Bwana*. "Give them time to get going on the beer first."

This was a necessary precaution. The first hour or two of these dances, before things had got really warmed up, were deadly dull and full of arguments as to which dances should be performed, so after a dinner punctuated by sibilant whisperings between James and his henchman we dressed ourselves in our best—it would have been an insult to attend in our everyday clothes. The *Mama* wore her tiara, I had a mandarin's coat, the children (woken up for the occasion) gauzy frocks covered with fur capes, the *Bwana* mess-kit. Led by James carrying a lantern we groped our way down the path and were ushered forward to a semi-circle of chairs by Sam, who was selling tickets and ensuring that nobody slipped in without paying.

"It is the European dancing," explained James kindly.

It certainly was, and in any European ballroom James would speedily have lost his head, because he waltzed and foxtrotted divinely. Indeed most of these Bemba did and revolved very correctly, clad in flimsy dresses and lounge suits. The scene was entirely different from that in the mine compound. Here men and women danced together, there was no attempt at mime, they clapped studiously for *encores*, bowed to their partners, behaved with incredible dignity. But the sight of James whirling to the strains of *The Blue Danube* in his dinner-jacket against a background of black faces, bobbing lanterns and star-spangled sky, was astonishingly African.

Sam came and stood beside me. "Are you not dancing?" I asked.

He laughed hugely. "No, *Mama*, I have six wives but only one of them can dance and she is ill."

They brought us weak lemonade, specially made for us, and scones of rough flour, and we went across between

dances to greet the chief who squatted in the doorway of a hut, an enormous pot of beer beside him, and then I sat hypnotised by the shuffle of feet on sand, and the twinkling lights, and the thrum of the drums, and the red glow of the fire where the pot of water boiled for tea-making. For tonight the babies were parked with old grannies in one corner, and after each dance their mothers would cross the floor, pick them up and feed them in the most natural way in the world. Underneath their sophisticated clothes they still remained the simple, warlike folk who had once come from the Congo, and not all the *tikkis* taken at the door could alter that fact.

I didn't want it altered. I wanted the Bemba to find work, and safety, and cures for the many evils which beset them; but I wanted them to seek these things under the wise leadership of those who knew enough of native character to draw out the innate happiness of the black man while trying to eliminate the cruelties which overlie that happiness. Was I crying for the moon? I didn't think so. Such a task might take fifty, a hundred, even more years, but it could be achieved by white men of the right stamp.

But it was time for us to go. We said good-night to everybody and were escorted home by James, who paused at the door of my room. "To-morrow, *Mama*, as you know, I go to Kasama with the *Bwana* so I must say good-bye now. But you must promise to come back so that we may take other expeditions. Oh, and *Mama, please* do not forget the big photograph in the gold frame."

"No, James, I shan't forget."

I couldn't say much to him, I felt too miserable. I thanked him for all his kindness to me and, for the last time, said I hoped he wouldn't go on believing that his ex-wife witched his food.

"She does, *Mama*, but she will not hurt me too much if I live in a good way. See, I have put your orange-juice by your bed, and these are your clean clothes from the wash, and here is your hot water."

He moved to the door, then turned. "I miss you very much," he said.

Long after he had gone I knelt by the wood fire contemplating life without the faithful James. Ever since my first day at Shiwa Ngandu he had taken me under his wing, looked after my every want, tended me as carefully as any mother her baby. He had been unfailingly courteous, he had put up with all my *jinga* escapades, he had interpreted for me, told me stories and legends, journeyed with me for long days through the bush.

The *Mama* came in. "Will you come and help me get the picnic-basket ready? They're starting at dawn for Kasama and we forgot all about it with the excitement of the dance."

I picked up my lamp and followed her through the courtyard to the kitchen quarters. "I can't imagine," I said passionately, "how I'm going to exist without James."

"I know," she said, "and Mulemfwe."

But I couldn't bear even the thought of dear Mulemfwe, so began to be very brisk and explore pantry and larder for thermos flasks, bread, meat and so forth. Every single thing in that kitchen made weird sounds in the darkness. The crickets chirruped and squeaked in the hearth, the very pots and pans seemed to crackle at you, I put my foot down on something feathery and warm and gave one agonised yelp. It was only a live chicken in a net which the chief had brought as tribute, but it shook my nerve and when I met a rat on the stairs leading to the store-room I quailed. Then we couldn't find the keys, and the thermos was broken, and the sink was crammed with dirty dishes and silver thrown carelessly down by a George anxious to wend his way dance-wards, and the big table so littered with debris that there was nowhere to cut the sandwiches.

Eventually we hauled a very merry Sondashie back from the compound and somehow packed the picnic-basket.

To-morrow would be my last whole day at Shiwa Ngandu.

## / VII

To-morrow was to-day—and gone like a streak of lightning. I spent most of it drowsing in the enchanted pool and taking snapshots of the family which I vowed I was going to send to a newspaper with the information I had found a new white tribe in Central Africa. And then it was sunset, and as we drove home first a buck and then a lithe, spotted shape ran across the road before us. That night the *Mama* and I talked endlessly of paradise.

Next morning the children came and sat on the edge of my bed. "Don't go," they said. "Stay till next month, the soldiers are coming then."

I groaned.

The governess came in. "Would you like me to pack for you?"

Almost I wept. Packing was so final. There was a mail in and a letter from home which said that the weather was abominable. I stared out of the window at the brilliant morning and sighed. Who on earth wanted to go back to England?

That last morning was ghastly. I wandered round the house like a lost soul while the governess packed fiercely and efficiently, and people kept rushing up to tell me a deputation awaited me on the verandah. They brought me assegais, and wooden bowls and spoons, and the *Mama* draped a leopard-skin and a civet-cat around my shoulders, and loaded my wrists with heavy ivory bracelets, and gave me the most delicious little native piano.

Tearfully I kept mumbling "*Mapoleni!*" to the eager black folk who presented me with gifts, but knew a certain light relief when the atrocious Leonard Billy arrived bearing a live chicken beneath his arm. "*Presenti!*" he announced.

I said, "I'm very sorry, but I can't take a chicken in the *ndecki*."

The *Mama* swept down on us. "How dare you bring that

bird! You know perfectly well you want the *Mama* to buy it. Go away and get the wooden spoon you promised to make for her son."

I remonstrated. "After all, he meant it kindly."

"Indeed he didn't. After *ulendo* you ought to know that a hen calls for another *presenti* in return."

Leonard\* Billy slunk back with the spoon and dangled it before my nose. "You will remember my Scout photograph and the letters from your son?"

One of the *capitaos* trotted forward with a native axe, and another handed me a chief's ceremonial axe, and my stock of war-like implements grew so vast that at eleven o'clock it was decided that the house-tailor must forthwith run me up a blue denim bag in which to carry them.

"Anyway," said the *Mama* with conviction, "nobody ever leaves Northern Rhodesia without a blue denim bag."

I left the governess squeezing the last of my things into the case and wandered down to say good-bye to Shem. "One last tin of Pall Mall cigarettes?" he wheedled.

I regarded him severely. "None of that, Shem, C. to C.'s are quite good enough."

He giggled and gave me a cake of virulent-smelling pink soap as a parting gift. "I think," he said judicially, "you are the sort who will come here again. You like the black people."

"Yes," I promised, "I'll come again."

"And tell your friends in England, *Mama*, that they can buy all requirements at Shem's store."

I fled before I disgraced myself by weeping into the £2 10s. od. mackintosh which still dangled from its hanger.

As the *Bwana* had the car the lorry was requisitioned to take us down to the aerodrome. It arrived at noon, a full hour too early, and I made faces at it as I ate my lunch. But the least sure thing in Shiwa was the lorry-driver, who had a delightful habit of parking himself in remote corners and

going to sleep, and this morning he received strict instructions he was to sleep in the cab if slumber he must. But when the house-boys caught the far drone of the aeroplane and shouted "*Ndecki!*" "*Ndecki!*" (for nobody ever knew the time at Shiwa and the clocks might easily be half an hour fast or half an hour slow) the wretched driver had vanished off the face of the earth.

"*Jingas!*" yelled the *Mama*, and we all danced up and down in a fearful state of agitation. It was a full mile down to the aerodrome and every second the aeroplane was coming nearer. Suddenly the housekeeper, intrepid woman, sprang into the lorry-cab, pulled and pushed at the immense gear-lever and pressed the starting-pedal. By some miracle it worked and we piled in beside her as she gathered speed down the drive while houseboys, villagers and a host of piccanins clambered into the back.

We reached the aerodrome just as the aeroplane was landing, to find a huge crowd of natives awaiting us, headed by Mulemfwe, for that splendid old man had come all the way in from the new bridge to bid me farewell. He came forward to me and took both my hands in his own, giving them the double handshake used by the Bemba, and I felt something cold slip into my palm. I looked at it. It was a Coronation sixpence, the rarest gift he could devise. Mulemfwe it was who hoisted me into the machine because there were no steps and who stood waving me good-bye until we soared above Shiwa lake.

And as I looked backward and down, the last trace of Shiwa Ngandu I saw was the print of his bare foot on the dusty *ndecki*.

## CHAPTER XI

### INDIA? AFRICA?

#### I

“Good God, woman!” said my Scots friend at Mbeya as he helped me out of the plane. “What are you travelling for, Barnum and Bailey’s?”

Rather huffily I began to repack the blue denim bag from which protruded the hind quarters of a civet-cat, several tangerines and the ceremonial axe. Perhaps my luggage was a shade peculiar, but there was no need to be rude about it. “I’ve given you the same room,” he went on, “and Fatty’ll be in in a moment on the southbound plane.”

I felt slightly cheered. It is always pleasant to return to a place where you have known happiness, and although the ache for Shiwa was well-nigh unendurable I looked again on Mbeya and found it good. The Nyasaland boys still beamed, and the bath-water was still peaty, and the crocodiles in the lake were still overfed, and the ground engineer volunteered to take my letters to Mpika on next morning’s plane.

“Are you going straight home?” they asked.

“No, I’m staying in Kenya.”

“What on earth for?”

Depression overwhelmed me once more. I didn’t know what for, and if I’d had the chance I’d have stowed away in Fatty’s cockpit, only there simply wasn’t room for anyone else except himself.

“Man alive,” said the Scot gloomily, “but you’ll not like Kenya.”

I hunched myself on the wide hearthstone by the fire, and warned them I should develop an attack of major hysteria if they mentioned the word Kenya again.

"Right," they said, "we'll play crap."

We did. I've never met an airman who didn't play crap. Fatty's plane came in, and we took the mail into Mbeya town and sniffed at the main street and drove back to the rest-house. Suddenly someone said, "A woman flying solo left Mpika this morning ten minutes before your plane and she hasn't got here yet."

I felt disturbed. "But she's frightfully overdue. Aren't you going to do anything about her?"

"Not until we're damn' well made to! No doubt the poor Air Force lads will be sent skating about after her in the morning. These amateurs who try this Cape to Cairo stunt are a menace. There are no records they can break, there are plenty of commercial planes, yet they soar off into the blue and have to make a forced landing if they don't crash, and then we've got to risk our necks searching for them."

There was something in that. When you fly for your living it's not much fun scouring Tanganyika and Northern Rhodesia for a missing Moth.

"The last one," said the Scot, "cost the Government three thousand pounds."

I'm ashamed to say we went on playing crap.

Next morning we shivered off in the dawn. The only other passenger was an enormous German flying to Dodoma to catch the Dar-es-Salaam train. I felt sorry for him as the mere thought of waiting a day in that revolting town upset me, but he assured me in a guttural voice that it was a "verry flourishing centrr."

"But it's such a hideous place!"

He fixed me with a glassy eye. "A *beautiful* place. I was born there."

I relapsed, and when at length we circled the bare rocky hills and came down on the dusty aerodrome I tried vainly to find some saving grace in Dodoma. But it looked yet more dead than on my former visit, and it was blisteringly

hot, and after breakfast I sat on the rest-house verandah in the choking dust and strove to ignore a very fat and flirtatious Indian who sat opposite me. He offered me Turkish delight, and cigarettes that tasted of camel, and illustrated papers, and to my horror he followed me into the plane. "You know Nairobi, yes, no?"

"Slightly."

"A grand city, *our* city."

I looked a little puzzled. I had yet to learn that he more or less spoke the truth and that the capital of Kenya was the strangest piece of India ever dumped down in the middle of Africa.

Presently he went to sleep—on the box of Turkish delight—and I moved up to sit close behind the pilot and wheedle him into coming down low where there was hope of seeing game. "Too cloudy," he said, and climbed to 12,000 so that we floated over a cotton wool carpet.

"Look," he pointed ahead. "We're about a hundred and twenty miles from him."

Very far away, yet with every high-light and shadow clear in the upper air, was the peak of Kilimanjaro. More beautiful than any mirage seen in the desert he rode the clouds serenely, his snowy sides tinged to amber and rose and purple in the sunlight. For the next hour I never lifted my eyes from him, and then we plunged downwards through the mists to Moshi which lay sullen under a heavy sky. Peering up at greyness I found it impossible to believe that the great mountain towered above the aerodrome, but when we rose again and flew north past the foothills the clouds disappeared and the sun flashed once more on his gleaming flanks. As usual, we bucketed and bumped and swooped perilously close to the tangled jungle, and the Indian kept up a disastrous monologue on the grandeur of Nairobi.

"You must see the mosque, and the Indian banks, and the Aga Khan's offices, and the Boy Scout rally on Thursday when all our splendid Scouts will be on parade, and our

bazaars, and the restaurants where you have excellent—oh, such excellent—curry."

I stuffed wads of cotton wool ostentatiously into my ears and stared down at rhino, buffalo, giraffe and lion, but behind me the chi-chi voice still went on, for its owner could not conceive of anyone being interested in mere animals.

Only as we neared Nairobi did my misgivings return. The telegram accepting my invitation to stay in Kenya had been sent quite a long time before from Kapiri Mposhi, and although "we were almost a *boma*" I wasn't at all sure whether it had ever reached its destination as I had a faint recollection it had to journey round by Salisbury and Johannesburg. Maybe there would be nobody to meet me, maybe my friends had repented of their kindness, maybe—here I pulled the mirror from my bag and gazed at it in horror—they simply wouldn't own me. My hair was half-way down my back, my face coffee-coloured, my brown arms and legs one mass of scratches. My skirt bore distinct traces of sitting in Shiwa swamp, and my veldtschoen had long ceased to respond to scrubbing with a wire brush. We came down with a vicious twist and turn and taxied towards a group of people who looked as though they were just going to Ascot.

I don't think I have ever felt such a hick as when I stepped out of that aeroplane. In my right hand I clutched an assegai, in my left I carried the ceremonial axe. Behind me a native seized the denim bag with such vigour that all the tangerines rolled out. Frozen faces regarded me. Not one was familiar. An officious young man demanded my passport, my ticket, my money and my dutiable articles. I crawled to the Customs Shed acutely aware of veiled references to bush-manners. "Is there a car from R— to meet me?"

A willowy youth shook his head, then as though his prolonged scrutiny had at last proved to him that I was free,

white and well over twenty-one, he asked my name and informed me my hosts would be along in a few minutes.

Those few minutes seemed an æon. During them the interested crowd of Ascot-goers gathered at the door of the shed and watched me, the denim bag, the case and the typewriter being weighed and examined. Frantically I tucked the "leopard's tail out of sight, assured the youth I had no intention of selling the camera in Kenya, of catching yellow fever, or of staying in the blasted colony an hour longer than I need, and asked if he would be so kind as to keep the bag and the weapons for me until I returned a few days later to board the Kisumu plane.

"It's against the rules," he said doubtfully. "I mean, we can't accept responsibility for valuables."

At that moment the Lioness, complete with Gory Rasputin, rounded the corner of the shed and embraced me with fervour. The Ascot crowd wilted. Spears, axes, leopards, lions and civet-cats! Clearly we were quite mad.

## II

Try as I would I couldn't take to Nairobi. The town was one long hotel, and in one or another of these somewhat battered caravanserais the *jeunesse dorée* of Kenya sipped drinks innumerable. At least they didn't sip them, they gulped them, and as they gulped they grumbled continually about the state of the country. When I knew them a little better I realised that most of them had poured money into this glorious-looking land, and lost it through plagues and pests and climatic vagaries, had become thoroughly disillusioned. If they hadn't gulped drinks they would probably have committed suicide.

They gloomed about the fall in the price of sisal, and the fly which had attacked the flax, and the necessity of growing pyrethrums since these daisy-like flowers provided the basis for many insecticides and ought to be a paying proposition.

But was anything ever a paying proposition in Kenya? I grew to doubt it. The cattle got tick-fever, or tsetse, or were gored by buffalo or demolished by leopard and lion. The crops were ruined continually by locusts or other insects, or by plant diseases, or by weather—for here you could not count on months of clear dry weather as you could farther south. The chickens got gapes, and the dogs got worms—everybody or everything got something dire and dreadful.

So the only thing to do was to leave your up-country ranch or farm and chase along villainous sandy roads in your Ford lorry, and hit the high-spots in Nairobi, and buy books you didn't particularly want at the *East African Evening Standard* book-shop, and have your hair waved at the very chic hairdresser, and swim at the Club, and go to the races, and forget to pay your bills.

And all the time the *babus* waxed fat. They owned most of the shops, most of the Banks, most of the real-estate offices. They waddled along the roads with their pretty wives and their furtive-eyed, nasty little children. Their particular suburb had rows and rows of fine houses, the bazaars swarmed with them, they stood at the doorways of incredibly evil drink-shops and inveigled the wretched Africans within.

In short, the Indians were Nairobi. The Indians had built the railway from Dar-es-Salaam, the houses, the stores, the cinemas. The Africans hated them yet feared them, for the *babus* were not good masters and had an unholy flair for extracting two pounds of flesh instead of one from their debtors. And from the Indians the African learnt worse habits than ever he learnt from the lowest white man, for there was something in the tortuous Oriental mind which strongly appealed to the cunning native. He admired the way in which the Indian made money and the shady methods he was not above employing and the ease with which he sold third-class goods at first-class prices. At

the same time he hated the Indian, for the brown man had wrested from Kenya all that the black man could not touch.

Bewildered by this strange and noisy city where countless motor-cars whizzed up and down broad streets and life was a series of journeys from one hotel to the next, I walked dazedly into the hairdresser's and emerged refreshed and tidy, but the poorer by fifteen shillings and much argument with the Levantine proprietor who wanted to sell me every powder and unguent known to Paris. But I liked the hotel where we stayed because we had a "cottage" of our own, two bedrooms, a bathroom and a sitting-room, and here I could sit back, take a long breath and try to sort out my impressions of Nairobi.

I wasn't very successful, for you couldn't sort out confusion and you were further hampered by constant reminders that so-and-so was now living with so-and-so, or that Mrs. Somebody had just got her fourth divorce, or that the pretty girl over there was with her father's ex-ex-wife.

"People just don't stay married very long in Kenya."

I said, "Oh, my!" called for another drink, reflected that more habits than one might be catching in Nairobi, and hastily cancelled my order.

More bewildered than ever I walked out into the courtyard and gave a loud shriek as something furry descended with a plop on to the back of my neck. It was only the hotel's pet monkey who lived in a tree to which it was attached by a long rope, but it helped to shatter my peace just a little more. In the streets I saw Americans, Englishmen, Jews, Portuguese, Italians, Germans, Greeks, Turks, Chinamen, Japanese, Dutchmen—and Indians. I saw hardly any Africans; there wasn't much room for them among all these superior races. I bought shoe-laces in Woolworth's and wondered why the police lines should be a huddle of derelict huts when the market was a superb building topped by minarets, and how the multitudes of

slowly drifting figures who passed me ever made a living. "I want to go in a rickshaw," I said.

"Oh, you can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Oh, well, it isn't done."

I walked on morosely, kicking up the dust with my feet.

But when the blue dusk came down and the myriad lights twinkled Nairobi was a fairy city. You forgot everything except the dark wonder of this African night and knew only that you could drive round and round the town for hours, sniffing the strong scents of a hundred tropic flowers. (In the daytime you smelt nothing but Indian.) Even the bazaars looked lovely with their bright-coloured wares dangling beneath chains of glittering lights and their picturesquely dressed customers hovering before the windows. Indeed, so much nicer was Nairobi by night than by day that I came to the conclusion the only way to enjoy it was to sleep from dawn until dusk.

Not that anybody slept much in this country. The altitude again, for a mile above sea-level was a mere bagatelle and nearly all the up-country folk lived at a height of from 7,000 to 10,000 feet. And they were near the Line. Small wonder they chased their own tails with such extraordinary gusto—the more I knew of them the more I realised the devastating effect climatic conditions had on them, and I myself was conscious of a perennial and tight band round my forehead when we drove anywhere above about 7,000, and so soon as I spotted a field of pyrethrums (which will not thrive below that height) I would implore my host to descend again into the valley.

After dinner people would drift into our cottage, discuss the latest scandal and the abominable prices of sisal, or flax, or coffee, or tea, or whatever it was they happened to grow, and drift out again. We all drifted: this was Nairobi and quick movement of any kind was debarred. The sad-eyed Kikuyu boys also drifted—with the result that you waited

hours for meals, drinks, baths, whatever you had ordered. Nobody minded; Kenya was one hell of a country anyway, and they wished they'd never set foot in the place. If they could only get a decent price for farm or ranch now, they'd be off for home by the first boat.

And after a year at home they'd ache to come back to Kenya, for ~~she~~ had somehow got under their skins.

### III

We drove out of the town towards the Kikuyu Reserve and the tall Swahili swaggered past in their blankets, their women-folk walking behind them bowed down under heavy loads. The Kikuyu themselves, a smaller thinner race altogether, squatted indolently by the roadside, flicking whips at their mangy cattle or tending their crops in desultory fashion. An apathetic tribe, spoilt by too much contact with coloured men, they didn't impress me one little bit, and I marvelled that they had ever been fighters. Their Reserve was set in the most glorious country—for Kenya was infinitely more beautiful than Northern Rhodesia. Great sweeps of thorn (mimosa) in full flower turned the hillsides to gold, tropical bushes and trees were laden with blossom, deep wooded valleys gave way to mountain passes as we neared the Mau Escarpment which hid the Rift Valley. Up and up we spiralled, our wheels skidding madly in the dust, and all of a sudden I poked my head out of the cab and gasped, for below me the red rock precipice fell sheer to the soft, green fields thousands of feet beneath. This was the Rift, the amazing cleft which cut through the continent, the home of the proudest fighting tribe in all Africa, the Masai.

The lorry slithered downhill at an acute angle, righted itself by some miracle on every bend, and thrabbled on between sisal plantations to more mountains and the magic of Naivasha and the rosy loveliness of the flamingo lakes.

As the Lioness had promised, she was showing me the Rift. I loved it, yet always behind it I sensed the cruelty of Kenya, a cruelty more menacing even than that of Bwana M'kuba, because the face of this equatorial land was so serene.

All that day we spent in the Rift, driving back to Nairobi in late afternoon by another and yet more enchanting road and stopping at a miraculous estate where the rose gardens stretched for miles. Everything looked so rich, so fertile: everything was in reality so grim. But when we slid through Nairobi streets again I shivered and asked if we could leave the town again on the morrow.

We did so, and went out to the Ngong hills (the hills of peace), and they glowed purple and crimson in the sunlight and seemed the only gentle things in Kenya. Colonies of houses smothered in bougainvillea and orange-shower creeper lay in their shelter and at one of these, where the owners bred dachshunds and grew passion-fruit, we stopped for tea. They were quiet, middle-aged folk, totally different from the hectic creatures who dashed in and out of the town, and they worked exceedingly hard, their sole relaxation being an occasional visit to Nairobi in order to shop and go to the cinema. I stared at the hills, and the passion-fruit trees, and the dogs, and wondered if these things compensated for the endless labour and the loneliness. I liked to think they did: knowing the desperate difficulty of wresting a bare living from this land I wondered.

## IV

We ate exquisite crayfish in the French restaurant, and we swam at the Club, and we went the round of the hotels, each one bigger and brighter than the last, and we did all the things people do in the fabulous town of Nairobi, and suddenly it was time to rush to the airport. Kind as my hosts had been I could not regret leaving the place. It was hard, brittle, as chancy as the thin, clear air which enveloped

it. It fancied itself as the Queen of African cities, and it harboured the very dregs of humanity drawn from north, south, east and west. Yet I understood now how people went out to Kenya full of high hope and remained to become querulous gulpers. To these settlers Nairobi was the only possible anodyne to the hardships of life up-country.

They had sent a reporter to the aerodrome to ask me my views on Kenya. I said, "She's a grand country. She breaks your heart and your body and throws them on the scrap-heap. She's a cross between Medea and Medusa."

The poor little man was so scarified that I don't think he stopped running until he reached the haven of a chromium-plated bar. They were touchy in Kenya. They moaned continuously themselves, but let an outsider say so much as one word against the colony and they were furious.

Fatty was the pilot. He had one other passenger, the owner of a chrome mine in Southern Rhodesia. I knew nothing of chrome mines—but I did by the time we reached Kisumu as he showed me a bag of samples, explained the workings from A to Z, and poured information into my buzzing ears throughout the violent thunderstorm which, as usual, was raising Cain above the Rift. The plane behaved atrociously, and at last I complained bitterly to Fatty about some extremely heavy registered packages which slid about the floor under my feet.

"Bullion," he yelled, "£27,000 worth."

Gleefully I kicked that bullion all the way to Kisumu—it was a fine sensation.

## CHAPTER XII

### FLYING NORTH

#### I

KISUMU preserved its twilight appearance, its lowering skies, its atmosphere of sticky heat. The clock didn't yet go, and the mosquito-netting was thicker than ever, and the writer of *Inch by Inch Through Darkest Kavirondo* was still sitting in the lounge waiting for a fresh victim. They said it was a pity I couldn't stay for a while and learn to appreciate the amenities of the place, and they reminded me of the proximity of the line, and of the fact that they possessed a cinema and a squash rackets court.

It didn't seem to be the sort of place that changed much.

"You're going in *Calypso*," said the ground staff. "Fifteen other passengers."

My heart sank. Fifteen of them! Oh, this was awful. They would all be gregarious, and none of them would share my fondness for the Bemba, and probably they would all be sick. I went to bed early, rose grouchily before dawn and crept out to sit on the steps and get whatever air there was in Kisumu. My fifteen fellow-passengers had been struck by the same bright idea and we sat glowering at each other in the half-light. There were two experts in natural history who had been photographing game in Kenya, there were two pleasant married couples, there was an Indian (there would be, for we were still in the colony), there were lots of other people who appeared merely as heads buried in coat-collars. The Southern Rhodesian and I decided we hated the lot of them and turned our backs very rudely and stared at Victoria Nyanza and wondered if we should see "The Judge."

"The Judge" is the ancient crocodile who rules the vast

lake, and long before the white man ever came to Kenya the natives used to chain their offenders to a tree some few feet from the water's edge and await "The Judge's" verdict. If he considered the victim guilty he would push his snout out of the shallows, waddle ashore and seize him. If he thought him innocent he would leave the wretched creature shivering on the beach for two hours at the end of which time he was released, usually mad from sheer terror.

But "The Judge" had long ago changed his quarters and now lurked up in Uganda, near Entebbe, so we were unlucky, and soon the flight-clerk hustled us into a car, through the customs and aboard *Calypso*. I made for the smoking compartment, much to the sorrow of the steward, and entrenched myself behind a pile of books. This trip, I thought fretfully, was going to be hell. I didn't want to leave Africa, and I hated travelling with a crowd of my own kind, and the only comfort I had in the world was Mulem-fwe's Coronation sixpence.

I said to the captain, "If you do any tricks over the line I'll shake you."

He grinned. "We don't need to now. We've got lovely little certificates we give you instead."

I perked up. Life looked a shade brighter, and by the time we had been in the air twenty minutes I loved my fifteen companions dearly. At Fort Bell we picked up a dear old gentleman afterwards known as "The Father of all the Ugandas," and then we made west for Lake Albert and Butiabal. We didn't like the idea of Butiabal and we said so, but when we learnt that a stop there meant we should fly north over the Murchison Falls we smiled on the captain like so many tigers and purred what a nice man he was. Unfortunately we came down at Butiabal after breakfast so that a poor D.C. from somewhere remote in the Southern Sudan who boarded us there had to stay himself with oranges and bananas. Even for him, however, Murchison Falls made up for everything. We hovered low above them

and simply goggled out of the windows, for none of us had known there was so much big game in such a small space in all Africa. A herd of elephant trampled off tossing their trunks, four rhino fled with lowered heads from the roar of our engines, a magnificent buffalo gazed up at us, giraffe, buck and wart-hogs scampered madly. The two natural history merchants nearly came to blows over their moving-cameras and the rest of us gripped the window rails and danced up and down with excitement. The Falls themselves were very beautiful, but in the pools above them the great crocs basked, their scaly bodies stretched out, their ghastly snouts lifting every now and again to show the cruel teeth.

We crossed the Sudan border and droned on above the Nile to our old friend Malakal, where the heat shrivelled us as soon as the steward flung the doors open. Here an extremely erudite and most strangely amusing professor joined us looking rather like a species of Boy Scout in khaki shorts and a very tattered blue shirt.

“Curry for lunch?” I asked the steward.

It was always curry at Malakal. We fished again for the would-be mullet, and threw them crumbs, and talked a lot about the Bor elephant, which had taken to the hills as the rains were on, and we took off in a flurry of spray and *sudd* for Khartoum.

It was at Khartoum that the professor, the D.C. and I really began to be ribald. Jolting across the desert from the river to the Grand Hotel we rashly promised a very serious lady that we would show her sheikhs on camels. We passed several dead donkeys, one or two ghastly and distended corpses of cattle and a walled village—but never a sign of sheikh or camel. “There you are,” the professor announced briskly, “that is what we call an embryonic sheikh on an embryonic camel.” It was a skinny Arab on a very minute donkey, but the lady was suitably impressed, and when he basely told her that a pi-dog was a jackal I really think she believed him.

The D.C. hailed from a Sudanese post somewhere near French Equatorial where the tribesmen had been cannibals not so long ago, and he was full of horrific tales of their habits. On his arrival there a year or so earlier he had been greatly distressed because each time he drove his car he ran over at least one dog, and being a lover of canines himself he had showered ten-piastre pieces as largesse to the poor owners who had thus summarily lost their pets. Not until he was heavily out of pocket did he discover that the custom of a tribe newly weaned from cannibalism is to eat dog—a kind of happy medium, one presumes, between human flesh and that of cattle or game—so that the natives were deliberately driving their wretched animals into the road in order that the kind *Bwana* might not only kill their food for them but pay for doing so as well.

"The Sudan," said the serious lady frigidly, "must be a terrible country."

"Awful," agreed the professor. "Wait till you see Khartoum—but even that is nothing to Egypt."

Khartoum was grilling hot but, blessing of all blessings, free from mosquitoes, so I rested under the fan in my vast bedroom and told the Sudanese to make up my bed on the wide balcony. Heat or no heat the Grand Hotel was a pleasant place, with the brown Nile flowing past it, and huge jugs of iced coffee at any hour of the day or night, and an enchanting spot known as the Blue Nile cinema which was situated most oddly inside the barracks. Here you sat on plush seats under the dark Sudan sky and watched the antics of Mr. Fred Astaire and Miss Ginger Rogers, and such sophistication made both myself and the D.C. feel quite dizzy.

But the best thing that happened in Khartoum was the remark made by a woman visitor at a cocktail party at the Palace, for in one of those queer silences which fall on the best regulated parties she asked in a loud voice, "Do tell me, who *was* General Gordon?"

After this hilarious evening I lay on my balcony and watched the river lighten under the rising moon. Below me the patient vendors of bangles and leather bags and filigree work still squatted by their red cushions, and the taxis hooted, and the Arabs still trotted by on their donkeys, their long robes trailing in the dust. How many nights had Charles Gordon spent looking out on this same river?

## II

There was dawn again over the Nubian desert and a stifling half-hour at Wadi Halfa where we sipped lime-juice in the rest-house and prayed for death. I think the Blue Nile cinema must have gone to our heads like almighty wine, because we were in the most impossibly frivolous frame of mind, giggling at the slightest thing, making stupid jokes, behaving like children. As we neared Alexandria the D.C. asked me if I had ever been the round of the cabarets there. "We'll go this evening," he promised and I, who had so lately scorned civilisation, agreed with alacrity.

I did not know then what pitfalls awaited me in that shining, white city.

The harbour was the usual jumble of craft, and my optimistic idea that the air would be cooled by sea breezes proved entirely wrong, for Alex was, if anything, hotter than Khartoum and so dazzling that your eyes watered as you looked at it. Once again we trooped into the customs shed, submitted to inquiries from the waltzing Egyptians, dodged the fumigation authorities and gained the sanctuary of the Hotel Cecil.

An hour later I came to the conclusion that I liked Alexandria immensely. From my balcony I watched itinerant musicians, dancers and fire-swallowers. Indeed, the last-named intrigued me so much that I went down to the street for a better view of this man who brandished two flaming torches in his hands and then shot them, one after the other,

down his throat; but when I turned to go not only he, but two ragged Arab singers, a clown and an Egyptian with a tame monkey followed me screaming for alms. Desperately I dodged through the crowds on the promenade but still fury pursued me, and when I espied a very fat policeman I made a bee-line for him. "Nice day," he said. "Pleased to meet you," and waved a ridiculous small baton at the howling mob behind me. "Shoo! Shoo!"

They paid not the least attention. They wanted the blood of the Englishwoman who had so basely watched their entertainments and refused baksheesh. With much pantomime I handed the policeman five piastres—to my horror he beamed, put it in his pocket, and strolled away.

How I got back to the Cecil I don't rightly remember. I only know it was a long and arduous journey and that in the end I was hauled by the scruff of the neck through the bar door by one of the natural historians, who remarked mildly, "Say, you been in trouble?"

"Oh, no," I replied nastily. "Just looking round Alexandria."

The bar was stifling. We sipped cool drinks and stared longingly at the shut door until somebody with no experience of Egypt flung it wide and the *gulla-gulla* men rushed in. Within two minutes we were struggling wildly beneath an avalanche of white robes, brown legs, bearded faces, live chickens, snakes, firebrands, guitars and flowers. It took the entire staff to clear the room; thereafter the door remained closed and we frizzled.

The professor and I were most curious about the statues which decorated the front. The largest was of Zaghlul, and owing to a slight difference of opinion between members of the Government had not yet been unveiled. But for some obscure reason the Alexandrians had also swathed the other statues in folds of white gauze from head to foot and we were terribly anxious to know why. The Professor suggested that one must be of Il Duce, a second of the Führer,



THE JUDGE



and a third of Stalin. Whether he was right or not I do not know, but so long as we remained in the city we had an unholy desire to creep out in the small hours and twitch the veil from each shrouded figure.

“To-morrow morning,” said the captain, “we leave here at three o’clock. There are strong head winds blowing over the Mediterranean.”

To-morrow morning was a long way away. We were enjoying ourselves. We went the round of the bookshops, and I experienced the awful feeling you have when a book-seller says blankly that he’s never heard of your masterpieces, and we bought a collection of thrillers to while away our trip to Marseilles, and we ate a huge meal and then we sat out on our cabaret expedition.

Every second building seemed to house a cabaret. They were all packed to the doors and we spent most of our time being trampled on by perspiring Egyptians, but at last we reached a miraculous place where you booked a table for the night and kind of followed the cabaret round the building as it performed in various rooms. We grew a shade tired of that cabaret, for its artistes repeated the same turns time and time again, the only difference being that at each performance a few more garments were discarded—an endless strip-tease act, in fact.

We lost the Father of all the Ugandas, and we danced, and drank beer, and climbed up and down interminable staircases when the waiters requested us to move on, and told each other heartily how marvellous night life was after a spell in the bush, but my only real thrill was when a bearded Russian spectator suddenly broke from the crowd, rushed into the middle of the dance-floor, and gave the snake-dancer a smacking kiss on the stomach.

“I think,” said the D.C. firmly, “we’ll go back to the hotel now.”

We walked slowly along the Front and discovered with a jolt that it was two o’clock. The streets were still crowded

and all Egypt flirted and laughed under the moon. I staggered upstairs, had a bath and then, most foolishly, lay down on my bed. There wasn't time to go to sleep, of course, but . . .

I awakened to the clang of all the bells in Africa. Beside me the telephone rang violently. At the bottom of my bed an enormous Arab stood shaking a colossal dinner-bell. Up and down the room cavorted a small and most agitated Egyptian who clenched his fist at me and yelled, "Five minutes—you must be out of here. *Five minutes!*"

I snapped, "Don't be so silly," turned over and closed my eyes.

Pandemonium broke out. "Five minutes!" He put both hands on my shoulders and shook me.

Hazily I remembered that we left at three o'clock. "What's the time?"

"My God, the lady can ask the time when the bus is waiting at the door and the captain has been calling her on the telephone for the past half-hour."

I leapt. The Arab dropped the bell and handed me my frock. The little Egyptian began to throw my gear into my case—he threw in a sheet belonging to his hotel as well and it cost me quite a lot of money to send it back to him. I dashed into the bathroom, fumbled with the taps and turned on the cold shower by mistake. With my head and face dripping I tore downstairs and heaved myself into the bus where the other fifteen were sitting patiently.

They clapped me all the way to the harbour.

### III

We were going on in *Cambria*, the flying-boat which had made the Atlantic crossing the year before. We were rather uplifted at this, but despite my soaking crown all I wanted was to sleep—and sleep. Beside me sat a very charming and vivacious Frenchwoman who had just boarded

us, but I rudely ignored her eager conversation and fear I was asleep before *Cambria* left the water.

I awakened refreshed. My hair had dried (but fifteen shillings' worth of Nairobi wave was ruined), I felt pleasantly hungry, the appalling scene of the early morning had faded in my memory. I looked up and saw the captain leaning against the partition. "Are we past Crete yet?"

"No, we're going back to Africa."

"Nonsense." Then I stared out of the windows. Most peculiarly the sun was on the wrong side!

"Head winds. We haven't enough petrol to last us to Athens, and I don't relish coming down at Mirabella this weather."

Hurriedly I agreed with him. Not for worlds would I come down in that narrow, frightening ~~cleft~~.

The Frenchwoman was agitated and poured out a flood of questions. Now what on earth were "head winds" in French? My muzzy brain couldn't cope. I said brightly, "*Les vents sur la tête.*" She looked bewildered. All the way back to Alex I struggled with those wretched winds. There was only one pleasant thought connected with that journey—I should be able to retrieve the thrillers I had left behind me in my hurried departure.

But retrieving books in Alexandria was not so simple. They had been removed from my room and taken by the reception clerk. No, he hadn't got them but he thought the barman had them. No, the bar didn't open until eleven o'clock and even then as it was a Sunday probably the assistant wouldn't have the keys. The Frenchwoman wept, and the natural historians swore, and the professor took his camera out of bond and marched off to photograph the veiled statues. The rest of us sat about in lumps and thought vaguely of sending wires to our respective families. But what was the good of that? We didn't know if we would leave Africa to-day, to-morrow or next week. I borrowed a tremendous tome from one of the captains and

tried to mug up all the French technical terms for horrors like head winds. The French lady would be beside me until Marseilles and I wasn't being caught again.

The professor strolled back and looked over my shoulder. "What *are* you doing? Look here, there's no need for that, I'll explain to her."

He turned to the Frenchwoman and began a long and detailed speech. When he had finished she looked at me and tapped her forehead significantly. "*Il est crétin*," she said.

My smile stretched from ear to ear.

The barman produced the thrillers. The captain gave us leave of absence until two o'clock. We bowled out to San Stefano in a taxi, and watched young Egypt disporting itself in the incredibly blue sea, and drank champagne cocktails, and I developed a theory that the Fates clearly meant me to stay in Africa. We piled into *Cambria* again about mid-afternoon and looked back at the harbour and the far golden line that marked the beginnings of the desert.

"We'll stay in Athens to-night," said the captain.

I groaned. Jackson again!

It was very much Jackson again, for the serious lady had a passionate longing to see the Acropolis by moonlight. Weakly, the professor and I joined the party, and at the Beulé gate there stood Georg, his shirt a trifle dirtier, his manner a shade more deprecating. We followed him mutely. "You will notice," he said in a throaty voice, "that very few of the ancient monuments and statues remain. They are in the British Museum."

It seemed a sad pity to come all the way to Athens to see things which had been transported to the British Museum, but we panted on listening to the pearls of wisdom which dropped from Georg's mouth. "You will notice the Temple of the Virgins. You will notice that each Virgin had her left foot foremost."

The Professor and I sat down on a stone slab under the shadow of the Parthenon and laughed until we cried, heedless

of the black looks cast upon us by the rest of the party. Presently we pulled ourselves together and trailed on after Georg, who had developed a most trying pathological giggle. "You will notice—he-he—the W.C. of Pallas Athene."

It was too much. We cantered down the steps and lay back in the taxi in a state of hysteria.

Our companions were most upset. They really never felt the same towards us again.

## IV

We left Athens at two-thirty, our departure lit by Grecian flares and accompanied by a very fussy Government launch. After Corinth in the dawn had given me a surfeit of beauty I slept until Brindisi and thereafter I thought of Africa, of the faithful James, and the dark face of Mulemfwe, of the Copper Belt and the woman with leprosy, of the Bemba dancing under a golden moon and of the turquoise jewel that was Shiwa lake.

At Marseilles we took English papers aboard. They made gloomy study, for they were full of news of a European crisis and ominous threats of world war. A voice behind me said, "Why don't we offer Tanganyika back to Hitler?" and I squirmed uneasily in my chair while my mind reverted to the evening when we sat round the fire outside Mulemfwe's hut, and he had regarded me so trustingly and asked me so earnestly to be sure and remember the black man's problems when I was home in England. Flying up the Rhône valley under skies which changed swiftly from blue to grey I wondered despondently just how much hope there was of making a troubled mind in Europe conscious of an equally troubled mind in Africa. Not much, I felt. After all, why should people harassed by their own immediate affairs bother with those of a distant and differently coloured race?

And yet in my heart I knew it was supremely important to keep faith with those dark folk, and as we did an abrupt descent at Mâcon for petrol it seemed that the whole affair became a personal business between Mulemfwe and myself. Bleating in the wilderness I should probably be if I aired my views on Africa—yet I couldn't face that grave, solemn-eyed old man agajn if I let him down.

As we lay on the Saône the population of Mâcon, mostly composed of bespectacled and semi-naked young men with very pink skins, paddled slowly past us in canoes looking at us with much interest. Their gaze was complacent and I didn't like them much. I wanted the thudding of drums in the bush, and the tang of wood-smoke from camp fires, and the hot, bright light of a tropic sun. I even wanted my *jinga*.

Closing jaundiced eyes against Europe I fell asleep again, awoken to nod at the Eiffel Tower far to our right, and dozed until someone implored me to look at the Solent.

The flight-clerk came along slightly agitated. My blue denim bag had rather come to pieces. What could I do about it? I said, "string," borrowed several lengths of this and strapped them around odd pieces of blue denim and leopard skin. "And the weapons?" his voice was doubtful. But after Nairobi, arrival could hold no terrors for me, so I walked ashore carrying assegais, ceremonial axe and the whole bag of tricks, in the wake of the bullion which, after the astonishingly casual manner of the English, was being heaved along in a Southern Railway laundry basket. A porter kindly offered to help me, so I landed him with skin and oranges and fumbled in my bag for some small change.

"Hurry up," said the professor, "you'd better hop in. They're sending us up to Waterloo in a special."

I felt a little more cheerful. Special trains have always seemed grand to me. Suddenly an appalling thought struck me and I peered once more into my bag, then hared up the

platform after the porter. "Hi! Give me that sixpence back!"

He sniffed. "It's all right," I added, "here's a shilling instead. . . ."

He handed me the coin and I clutched it frantically. I had given him Mulemfwe's Coronation sixpence.

## EPILOGUE

### A LETTER FROM PARADISE

"It's early summer here—the orange blossom is being gathered and the jacaranda are coming out. All your friends are well—except that Ngolonwana, the extremely nice *capitao* (father of Temperature), who has been here eighteen years, died after three days' illness. One will miss him for ever and always as he was one of the decentest and most straightforward of men. Nelson, the school-master, speaking at the graveside said, 'Death like a lion has leapt upon our friend and taken him away. Where he has gone we shall all go, and we shall be judged according to our deeds. Bury him with his face towards his home.' "

*June–October, 1938*



